

The Belles-Lettres Series

SECTION III

THE ENGLISH DRAMA

FROM ITS BEGINNING TO THE PRESENT DAY

GENERAL EDITOR

GEORGE PIERCE BAKER, A. B.

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH IN
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



BEATRICE CENCI

Etched by W. B. Scott for the Shelley Society from
the picture attributed to Guido

THE CENCI

BY

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

EDITED BY

GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

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Biography

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, the eldest son of Timothy Shelley, Esq. (afterward Sir Timothy Shelley, inheriting the title from his father, Sir Bysshe Shelley, knighted in 1806), and of Elizabeth (Pinfold) Shelley, was born August 4, 1792, at the family seat, Field Place, Sussex. He received the rudiments of education from the Rev. Mr. Edwards, a neighboring Welsh parson, and was sent at the age of ten to Sion House Academy, near Brentford, a school not of the highest class socially, where he remained until he went up to Eton, July 29, 1804. There he began authorship and published *Zastrozzi, a Romance*, 1810. In the fall of that year he went up to Oxford, where he had previously registered, April 10, at University College. He at the same time continued authorship by the issue of *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire* (his collaborateur being his sister Elizabeth), which appeared in September, and by *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, printed at Oxford, and his second romance, written at Eton, *St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian*, published at the close of the year. In the spring he printed a tract, *The Necessity of Atheism*, and placed it on sale at the University bookstore. It was immediately suppressed. He was summoned March 25, 1811, before the college authorities, and on refusing to answer any questions as to the authorship of the tract he was expelled the same day for contumacy. Shelley went to London, where he remained until a reconciliation with his family was arranged. He soon offended them again, and irretrievably, by an elopement with a schoolmate of his sister, Harriet Westbrook, whom he married in Edinburgh, August 28. The wandering life which he led the next two years was mainly due to his restless activity in political reform, in which his sympathies were engaged from an earlier period. It always remained his chief practical interest. He visited Ireland early in 1812, as an agitator, and spoke on the platform with O'Connell, February 28, but after a residence of two months he returned to Wales. His chief publications were

An Address to the Irish People, Proposals for an Association, A Letter to Lord Ellenborough, all of the date, 1812, and he had also issued occasional political and satirical verses, several of which are now unknown. He revised much of his prose and included it in his notes to *Queen Mab*, 1813, with which his real career as a poet may be said to have begun.

He now returned to London where he lived in intimate connection with the political radicals, such as Godwin and Leigh Hunt, and here he fell violently in love with Mary Godwin, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, and eloped with her July 28, 1814, going to France and Switzerland. On his return, being now of age, he obtained from his father a suitable settlement for his support, since much of the large family fortune was entailed upon him. The serious pursuit of poetry gradually withdrew him in these years from his random political activity. He published *Alastor*, 1816, and *The Revolt of Islam*, 1818 (previously issued and withdrawn as *Laon and Cythna*). Meanwhile, during a second brief visit to Switzerland, in 1816, he had met Byron; and in the same year his first wife, Harriet, of whom he had for some months lost sight though he provided for her, committed suicide by drowning in the Serpentine, where her body was found, December 10. Shelley was formally married to Mary, December 30, and took steps to recover the custody of his children by Harriet, but the court denied his suit on the ground of his being an atheist, as shown by *Queen Mab*. He settled at Marlowe with his wife and two children by her, and engaged in study and the composition of *The Revolt of Islam*. Immediately after its issue he left England, March 12, 1818, and traveled by Paris to Milan; thenceforth he resided in Italy, visiting Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples, with brief periods of residence in each city, but in the main he lived in Pisa and its neighborhood. His literary production was rapid and large in amount. He published *Rosalind and Helen*, 1819, *The Cenci*, 1819, *Prometheus Unbound*, 1820, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, or *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, 1820, *Adonais*, 1821, *Hellas*, 1822; and he composed much that was withheld from publication. In Italy his life was solitary, but a circle of friends gradually formed round him; from time to time he was in communication with Byron, who was at Pisa during the end, and Trelawney and the Williamses were then daily companions. Leigh Hunt was to

join him and Byron in a literary venture, *The Liberal*, and it was to welcome him that Shelley came to Pisa from Lerici in the early summer of 1822. On July 8 he set out to return in his boat from Leghorn, together with Williams and a sailor-boy, Charles Vivian, and was lost in a sudden storm. His body was washed ashore near Viareggio, and was there burned, August 18, Trelawney, Byron, and Hunt being present. The ashes were buried at Rome in the Protestant cemetery.

The poems which he left unpublished were slowly given to the world. Mrs. Shelley issued a volume, *Posthumous Poems*, 1824, but it was withdrawn, owing to the opposition of Sir Timothy Shelley. *The Masque of Anarchy*, 1832, was published by Leigh Hunt; and *The Shelley Papers*, 1833, by Medwin, contained both verse and prose. Meanwhile several unauthorized editions appeared piratically. The first collective edition, however, was issued only after the death of Sir Timothy Shelley by Mrs. Shelley, in 1839, and to its contents much has been added by later editors. The story of his life was slowly narrated by those who had known him familiarly, Hogg, Medwin, Peacock, Hunt, Trelawney, and Mrs. Shelley, but a connected and full account from all sources was delayed until the publication of Dowden's *Life*, 1886.

Introduction

I. COMPOSITION AND PUBLICATION

IN May, 1818, at Leghorn, a manuscript volume narrating the story of Count Cenci and his family was put into Shelley's hands and interested him so much that his wife, Mary, made a copy of it. He urged her to write a drama on the theme, as he had great confidence in her dramatic powers; but, as was the case with *Charles I*, which he also proposed to her as a subject, she was not persuaded, and he finally took both themes for his own. He was not stimulated to begin, however, until after his return to Rome a year later. He visited the Palazzo Colonna and saw the picture of Beatrice Cenci, April 22, 1819. The image of Beatrice, he told Trelawney, haunted him, after seeing her picture. On May 11, the *Journal* records, he explored the old Cenci palace, "a vast and gloomy pile of feudal architecture." By May 14 he had begun the drama. He was interrupted in the composition by the sudden illness and death of his son, William, which occurred June 7; three days later the family left Rome for Leghorn. There they took a small house, Villa Valsovano, halfway between the town and Monte Nero, the scene of which is described by Mrs. Shelley.

"Our villa was situated in the midst of a *podere*; the peasants sang as they worked beneath our windows, during the heats of a very hot season, and at night the water-wheel creaked as the process of irrigation went on, and the fire-flies flashed from among the myrtle hedges:—nature was bright, sunshiny, and cheerful, or diversified by storms of a majestic terror, such as we had never before witnessed.

"At the top of the house there was a sort of terrace. There is often such in Italy, generally roofed. This one was very small, yet not only roofed but glazed; this Shelley made his study; it looked out on a wide prospect of fertile country, and commanded a view of the near sea. The storms that sometimes varied our day showed themselves most picturesquely as they were driven across the ocean; sometimes the dark lurid clouds dipped towards the waves, and became water spouts, that churned up the waters beneath, as they were chased onward, and scattered by the tempest. At other times the dazzling sunlight and heat made it almost intolerable to every other; but Shelley basked in both, and his health and spirits revived under their influence. In this airy cell he wrote the principal part of *The Cenci*."¹

He finished the first draft, August 8. He had, in July, sent to Peacock a translation of the manuscript narrative; but the suggestions his correspondent made arrived too late to affect the composition, and, besides, Shelley disapproved of them. He had also written to Miss Curran, at Rome, seeking to have an engraving made of the portrait of Beatrice Cenci for use as a frontispiece, but the expense was beyond his means. He put the play

¹ Mrs. Shelley's ed. 1839, ii, 272-76.

to press at Leghorn, probably at Masi's, and thus *The Cenci* is distinguished among his works as one of the few that were printed under his own eye. In the middle of December he sent the edition, 250 copies, to Ollier in London, and directed him to withhold publication until it should be decided whether Covent Garden Theatre would accept the play for acting. The decision being adverse, Ollier published the drama early in the spring of 1820. He reprinted it in a second edition, 1821. It was the only poem by Shelley of which there was a second edition in his lifetime, with the exception of the pirated issue of *Queen Mab*. It was noticed by the press; and though some of the reviews, as Shelley remarked, were "written with great malignity," nevertheless, he adds, they "on the whole give me as much encouragement as a person of my habits of thinking is capable of receiving from such a source, which is, inasmuch as they coincide with, and confirm, my own decisions."¹ He was really much disappointed, as this was the only one of his works for which he seems to have anticipated popular success. "*The Cenci* ought to have been popular,"² he wrote to Ollier; and to Peacock, — "if my play of *The Cenci* found none or few [readers], I despair of ever producing anything that shall merit them."³ Byron, he reports, "was loud in censure";⁴ and Keats, acknowledging a gift copy, regrets the austerity of the style and begs his forgiveness for "sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity, and be more

¹ Shelley to Ollier, Jan. 20, 1821, *Shelley Memorials*, p. 135.

² Idem (Feb. 16), p. 153.

³ Feb. 15, 1821. Peacock's *Works*, iii, 472.

⁴ Shelley to Hunt, Aug. 26, 1821. Hunt's *Lord Byron*, i, 406.

of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore."¹ Shelley himself lost interest in it. His final judgment is recorded by Trelawney:

"In writing *The Cenci* my object was to see how I could succeed in describing passions I have never felt, and to tell the most dreadful story in pure and refined language. . . . *The Cenci* is a work of art; it is not colored by my feelings nor obscured by my metaphysics. I don't think much of it. It gave me less trouble than anything I have written of the same length."²

Galignani appears to have had some copies on sale in Paris, as Shelley writes of an advertisement of it in the *Messenger*, but it is unlikely that this refers, as he supposes, to a separate French edition. *The Cenci*, like the rest of Shelley's works, began to be known only through the slow growth of his fame as the century advanced.

2. THE PLAY

The story of *The Cenci* is a family tragedy. Count Cenci outraged his daughter, Beatrice, whereupon the family conspired together and secured his murder, and in due time suffered execution for the crime. The theme of incestuous passion has been repeatedly treated in literature, and more than once great dramas have resulted; but Shelley veiled this portion of the action. In the play three crimes are linked together; that of Count Cenci, which is the motive of the action; that of the family, or parricide; and lastly the judicial murder, as

¹ Keats to Shelley, Aug. 10, 1820, Forman ed. 1895, p. 505.

² Trelawney, *Records*, i, 117.

the execution is here regarded, of the members of the family adjudged to death. Shelley considered that the delicacy with which he had treated the first crime would sufficiently allay natural repugnance to the subject, and the last two he treated with as much power as he was master of. The delicacy of which he speaks is not merely a matter of expression, but involves a radical change in the nature of the theme; he conceived the drama not as one of lust but of hate. To this end he makes the Count's crime the climax of a lifelong persecution of his family with which he crowned up his hatred of them; it is represented not as an act of passion but of long deliberated purpose to degrade, injure and destroy his victims; and lastly, it is important to observe, the Count seeks as the ultimate of his hatred, not the outrage of his daughter, but her consent, in order thus to ruin her soul. The play is, in its first movement, a study of hatred using atrocious means to destroy the victim.

The theme, so conceived initially, is placed in an atmosphere of opinion and social custom drawn from Shelley's idea of Italian society and history. This general environment is less in evidence because the play is, for the most part, domestic and interior; but its ideas permeate all the characters and its prejudices are an essential condition of the thought and action. The first element in this atmosphere is the place of religion in Italian life. Shelley himself calls attention to this in his preface, and states that religion is there a devout superstition without any relation to practical life; it is believed, but it does not affect conduct, at least until

after the event. Count Cenci and all his family are equally represented as devout and credulous; the presence of priestcraft is also illustrated by Orsino, the priest-lover of Beatrice, the kindly Cardinal Camillo and the inflexible Pope. The play thus takes place in a society in which religion is represented as supreme in civil power and over the minds of men, but without influence on their private lives. The second element is the idea of the *patria potestas*, the patriarchal conception of the family. It is set forth as the principle of Roman society. The father of a family is clothed with despotic power over his own; no one would dare to interfere with a domestic rule or to enter into the affairs of a household; least of all would the children and wife rebel, inasmuch as the father is protected by a veneration not to be overcome in their minds. Parricide, in such a society, is the most unthinkable of crimes. This state of opinion is reflected also in the conception of the Pope as the father of the church and exercising such paternal power, and also in the conception of God, in whose image, as the Father of all, the Pope is made. In the play, in fact, there is a consanguinity, so to speak, between God, the Pope and Count Cenci, which is very disturbing. It is clear, nevertheless, that Count Cenci in his mere fatherhood affects the persons about him, whether his children or others, as sharing in the divine right of the *patria potestas*, to rebel against which, whether in the family or the state or toward God, was the highest crime. The third element is pride of race, devotion to the honor of an ancient house; and this is represented as influential, not only over the family itself,

but over such mere members of the populace as were the assassins. Beatrice sustains herself under torture with this motive, and also appeals with it successfully to the murderer, Marzio. These three ideas — faith divorced from morals, the patriarchal autocracy and family honor — are the elements introduced by Shelley into the general texture of the play as being specifically Italian.

The theme itself is displayed rather through character than action, and in particular through the two leading characters, Count Cenci and Beatrice. Each when present fills the scene, and the interest of the drama is in the conflict of their wills. They are diametrically opposed one to the other; Count Cenci is a devilish incarnation of the principle of evil, and Beatrice a human embodiment of the principle of good. They are opposed in yet another way. Count Cenci is an intensely concentrated character, with such a monotone of villainy that he gains, as the play goes on, only by greater intensity and concentration; he is absolutely solitary. Beatrice, on the other hand, is a character acting by variety and diffusion, changing from stage to stage, and related by human companionship to every character in the play. She is the centre of its personality, in every aspect, while Count Cenci is the single malignant and maniacal force that, unloosed on her, ruins all. In him is to be noted the presence, as the source of his character, of another Italian trait or principle, — the trait commonly designated *virtù*. The most modern name for what is really one of the oldest of human moulds, “the Superman,” describes him. He is, in fact, individuality let loose and dominant, as in a mad Roman Emperor or a

Renaissance captain or cardinal. His words, when he is reminded of God's being, — "He does his will, I mine," might stand as a motto for this type. He has done his will, and no one rises up to oppose him. He gives his history in the first scene of the play, and himself notes the peculiarity of his nature, as Shelley conceived it, in the fact that he is an intellectual villain. It is quite true, also, that no other side of villainy except its intellectuality could have engaged Shelley's sympathy. He reasons his villainy, and seeks that which the mind's eye only beholds and rejoices in. This psychological "malady of thought" is noted as a family trait by Orsino and reflected in Giacomo, the Count's son, whose dramatic character lies only in its expression. Count Cenci conceives that the true injury lies not in the outrage of Beatrice, which is simple violence, but in the corruption of her soul, — in her consent. It is toward this that he moves, and at the climax it fills his thoughts. Beatrice, on the other hand, is from first to last the victim, but she reacts at every stage of disaster and reveals her nature in ways that awake increasing sympathy. The general development of the character is set forth by Mrs. Shelley, who describes it as "proceeding from vehement struggle to horror, to deadly revolution, and, lastly, to the elevated dignity of calm suffering, joined to passionate tenderness and pathos."¹ Shelley devoted all his power for dramatic revelation to the delineation of these two characters; but it is plain that both are of such a nature and so presented that a great opportunity

¹ Mrs. Shelley's ed. *loc. cit.*

is given in the play for silent action beyond the text; so much takes place in the mind of both, for which there are no words, that acting is essential to the integration of these characters and their bodying forth in a personality. Such passages occur in the exit speeches of Count Cenci, and a most notable one in the scene where Beatrice makes up her mind to the murder of her father, and not only resolves it herself but makes her resolution the whole life and strength of the enterprise. It is natural to suppose, therefore, that both characters would gain by being acted, and require action for their complete effect. The other characters are entirely subsidiary, and serve either to link the incidents and manage the detail of the action, to draw out Beatrice or Count Cenci, or to illuminate some aspect of the play in general. Giacomo and Orsino are carefully studied characters; the first, though little effectual in advancing the action, affords the only expression of the guilty sense of parricide, and Orsino, who is more directly engaged in the mechanism of the action, also expands the element of priestcraft and gives colors of subordinate villainy; but neither these nor the other minor characters really do more than fill up the scenes and carry on the necessary progress of the play. They do not interest the reader in their own fortunes. The dramatic fascination is substantially confined to Count Cenci and Beatrice.

The action, as has been stated, is threefold. Count Cenci is the spring of the crime against Beatrice; Beatrice is the spring of the crime against Count Cenci; the Pope is the spring of the crime against the victims in their execution. The first crime is brought forward in the

veiled words of Count Cenci in his first soliloquy in the opening scene, and develops especially in the mad scene (III, i) and the scene of the curse (IV, i); the second, first suggested by Giacomo (II, ii), is resolved upon (III, i) and executed (IV, iii); the third begins in the discovery scene (IV, iv) and fills the conclusion of the play (V). Such is the enchainment of the action. Looked on as one complete action it has its climax in the final speech of Count Cenci, his soliloquy (IV, i) closing the scene. This speech is one of double dramatic irony in that Count Cenci mistakes the drugged sleep that comes on him for the blessed slumber of a peaceful conscience, and also in that he triumphs in the thought of immediate success at the moment that he stands above his grave; it comes after the final and repeated refusal of consent by Beatrice, which is the centre of the conflict of their opposed wills; up to that point the action has gone forward; and, immediately after, the consequences simply unroll in the catastrophe, — the murder scene, the discovery scene, and the various scenes of the trial.

It is obvious that the action, so described, lags in some scenes and is not materially advanced by others. This results in an immobility in the situations, of which there are three corresponding to the threefold phase of the action, and these scarcely change at all in the progress of the scenes. There is much in the play not necessary to the action narrowly defined, or but slightly related to it. In other words it is not exclusively a play of plot. The first plan of murdering Count Cenci, which failed, and its dependent scene (III, ii), while giving the op-

portunity to display Giacomo's character in his soliloquy and, as has been said, to illumine the crime of parricide as such by the state of his mind, might be thought superfluous, since they do not materially affect the action. The same might be said of the scene between Giacomo and Orsino (v, i), though it displays Orsino's character and incidentally dismisses him from the play. In general these two characters, which Shelley took from the history of the case, are of slight use to the plot. It must be thought that the scene between Giacomo and Beatrice (iii, i) when he assents to the murder, though dramatically effective by the kiss in which they seal the compact, on which the scene closes, is nevertheless a decline in the interest, coming as it does after the powerful climax of the resolution of Beatrice to do the act. Orsino, too, is a difficult character to handle. A lover for Beatrice is impossible; if he were possible, the part of vengeance belonged to him and not to her; under the circumstances Orsino becomes an interested accomplice, a broker of assassins, with the hope of thereby entrapping Beatrice into his power. He is false to her in the matter of the petition. The effect of his character is to isolate her still more in a bad world; but on the play itself, as a chain of action, Orsino has little concrete influence. The petition, like the first plan for the murder, might be thought superfluous, though it helps to justify Beatrice. The fact is she does not need further justification. It will be seen from all this that Giacomo and Orsino, while they serve the play, do so in minor ways; so far as the action is concerned, nothing really depends on them except the hiring of assassins. Simi-

larly with the other characters, it is not for the sake of the action that they are present but for some other purpose. So far as the action is thought weak in structure, it is for this reason. There is, too, diffuseness in the conduct of the action; in the discovery scene, and throughout the trial, this is to be observed, and it is noticeable generally in the large number of soliloquies and in the number of lines given to the undramatic characters and episodes. High concentration is marked only in the feast scene, the mad scene, the scene of the curse, and intermittently in the trial scenes. It is plain that the weakness of the action, both in structure and conduct, is a consequence of immobility in the situations, of over-characterization and of dispersion.

It has been said, to notice the last limitation, that the interest of the play ends with the death of Count Cenci. It is true that the theme then changes so much as to become almost a new play. If Shelley had been interested in *The Cenci* only as a personal tragedy, he might have listened to the suggestion, which has since often been made, that Beatrice should have declared and gloried in her deed. In that case the Fifth Act might have been saved to these critics, and remained integral with the rest of the play. It is pleaded, on the other hand, that Beatrice desired to save the honor of the house, and was governed by this motive, though unavailingly. But Shelley, consciously or unconsciously, was interested in the play as a social tragedy, and the Fifth Act really moves in a larger world than that of the fortunes of a family in their private life. Moreover, Shelley was pledged by his convictions to an ideal of

patient suffering; under the spur of sympathy with Beatrice he defended her parricide, as he defended active and bloody revolution in politics if it occurred, but his heart was always rather with the idea of patience than of vengeance. In the Fifth Act he idealized the sufferer, and it was more consonant with his genius to do so. The break in the interest of the play, when it changes from the domain of tragic vengeance in private life to that of judicial murder by the most Christian of all states, is very marked; but it is more just to say that the theme changes in entering its third stage than that the play ends in the Fourth Act.

The Cenci, as is seen from this slight analysis, is not a playwright's, but a poet's play. It is written under a more liberal canon than that of stage-craft, under an older canon, — the canon of literature. Whether it be better or worse for that reason is not the question; it is in place here only to give a somewhat full exposition of its nature and contents. In its threefold phases it is a study of hate using atrocious means, of innocence driven to desperate crime, and of human fate under social justice organized in established authority. Shelley endeavored, in this instance, to write with the maximum of objectivity; but no poet can suppress himself in his work, and the personality of Shelley pervades the play. To indicate the ways in which it is related to Shelley is all that can be attempted here. It is, in the first place, a play of horror. Shelley was in boyhood initiated into literature by the then popular forms of German tales and wrote highly sensational romances in that style. Traces of this crude boyish taste long

remained in his work, and are seen even so late as in a cancelled stanza of *The Sensitive Plant*. Horror, or at least terror, is one of the constant themes of imagination. The thrill of it was never far from Shelley; in his last year at Lerici there were visionary incidents, as will be remembered; and it is appropriate to recall the fact that Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*. *The Cenci* may fairly be regarded as the climax in Shelley's work of this element in his nature. He was of a temperament to be attracted by this subject. It is not less to be observed, that this interest had become very subordinate. He naturally developed in a contrary direction, toward beauty, love, patience in ideal hope. In writing *The Cenci* he found it quite consonant with his natural choice to retire the atrocious crime, which is its principal motive, into the background, to veil it, and transform it into an instrument of another passion, hatred; and also to end the play in a glorification of suffering resignation to calamity rather than in an apotheosis of an act of vengeance however righteous.

Secondly, it is not a play of plot narrowly limited to a chain of events, but it is a psychological play; and it develops less by a presentation of action than by that of a series of states of mind in all the persons involved in the story. Shelley adhered very closely to the narrative as he had received it, even in small details; he told a clear and definite tale; but he was engaged not so much in the fatality of what occurred as in exposing the mental states of the actors, and he was as careful to do this for the least as for the greatest. Hence the superfluous scenes were included, and the number of

soliloquies, in which internal moods are best shown or at least most clearly and fully stated, is large. The psychological method is one with which his own mind most readily sympathized. It aided him especially in delineating Count Cenci, who however he may seem a monster to us is revealed in his own thoughts as intelligible to himself at least. This must be regarded as a triumph of genius for Shelley, himself so remote from such a world. A passage in the preface shows that his thoughts were mainly intent on the justification of the actors in the crime of parricide, and it was in the attempt to clarify their motives that he was led to excess of justification by including every incident that might palliate the crime and by exhibiting as much as it was practicable to exhibit of the black career of Count Cenci. He seems to have relied on this justification and on the historic reality of the events to remove the prejudice that he foresaw against the treatment of the theme at all. In this he was perhaps mistaken, so far as the actuality of the crime is concerned. The world of poetry is not the world of fact; that is to say, it is not the ordinary moral world; the events of ideal tragedy are viewed not so much as crimes but as things of nature; and it is the world of nature, the eternal process of things independent of man's judgments and expedients, that is the world of poetry. Real events must become tradition before they are fit material for the imagination; reality is rather an added grossness to crime; and it is because no crude sense of reality adheres to the *Œdipus*, for example, that it is supported as a tragic theme.

Thirdly, *The Cenci* is a play of womanhood. Shelley was pre-eminently a poet of womanhood, and this appears alike in his personal and his political verse. The ideal of free womanhood he had presented at great length in *The Revolt of Islam* at the beginning of his career, and in the later work of his genius the presence of woman under one or another form of ideality or of personal experience is constant. He knew women better than he knew men, and his sympathies were more deeply engaged by them. Beatrice seized on his imagination and his heart alike, and he delineated in her every phase of womanly attraction that the situation allowed. Count Cenci is a masterpiece of intellectual imagination; but Beatrice is a greater creation, because of the diversity, naturalness and human truth of the representation. She is a woman of power, of courage, of resolve, without losing in the least her femininity and womanly charm; she draws from every character, by the mere magic of her presence and the strength of her nature, the utmost of which they are capable, all the good that is in them; from Cardinal Camillo in the trial scene to the assassins in the murder scene, from the timidly fearful Giacomo to the sly insinuating Orsino, she holds them all up to their best, and while under her influence they live, however briefly and futilely, at the height of their capacity. They all take life from her. On the other hand in her own relations she shows all the sanctities of home affection; with her brothers and Lucretia she sympathizes, consoles, incites, sustains, — bears all burdens; and, for what is locked in her own heart, she endures all in a solitude of spirit that is never shared. She

helps all, but is helped by none. Beatrice is the single vital character that Shelley drew; here is his conception of a woman doing and suffering in life; and for all the gloom and terror of the tragedy that involves her, it is a picture of such sweetness, dignity and power as to be immortal, a type of ideal womanhood quite alone in our literature.

Lastly, *The Cenci* is a play of protest. Shelley without conscious intention delineates here that world against which he had rebelled; he had not so much created it as found it. This world, in which Beatrice lived, recalls that enclosing prison of Poe's tale, which each day contracted its walls till it became a coffin for the prisoner. Historically, it was a world of law that gave no protection, of government that enforced no restraint on the powerful, — law that at the last condemned the sufferer to death, and government that directed and executed the sentence, and called these things justice. Typically, it is the world of organized society, Christian, legal, powerful, in which one is without hope if he be a victim. This was precisely Shelley's idea of human government as he knew it in history and saw it in fact, the league of the oppressors of mankind; and the fate of the family of Count Cenci in the hands of Papal law was a type of the world. The minor incidents of the scene, the rack, testimony based on torture, the judge fixed in cruel purpose, are insignificant, the mind hardly rests on them, in view of the hopeless gloom of the whole process, — the world of injustice grimly reigning without appeal and naming itself God, Law, Right. The sense of hopelessness that this sight

gives brings to Beatrice the darkest hour of all her sufferings; nor did Shelley ever frame again in such deadly words the cry of despair as in her spoken fear lest evil might be finally triumphant in the infinite —

“If there should be
No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world,
The wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!”

Shelley could not free himself from what was the life-long preoccupation of his mind, — the Revolution and the modes to bring it about. In *The Cenci* he gives a terrible example of the old *régime*, its vices, wrongs, cruelties, its social futility. So far as the theme of the play is not personal tragedy but — as the theme of all great tragedy must be — human fate, it is here that it is to be found.

3. SHELLEY'S OBLIGATION TO SHAKESPEARE

The Shakespearean element in the play has been specially noticed in the London *Shakespearean Society's Papers*, vol. I, *The Cornhill Magazine*, vol. XIX, by Professor J. S. Baynes in *The Edinburgh Review*, April, 1871, and it is mentioned by other critics. It consists of a resemblance to passages or lines of the best-known of Shakespeare's dramas, and varies from plain imitation to a simple moulding of the phrase after Shakespeare's diction. The play is thus impregnated with Shakespearean words, image and tone, which color the style; and at times it also recalls the dramatic handling of well-known Shakespearean scenes and characters. It was Shelley's habit to incorporate in his verse, after

the old tradition of poetic composition, the style and phrase of great poets. In *The Cenci* he used Shakespeare as at other times he used Æschylus or Moschus; but the familiarity of the Shakespearean drama makes the fact noticeable, and impairs the appearance of originality in his work to an unusual degree. It is to be observed that the scenes, characters and lines that he follows are such as belong to the most elementary knowledge of Shakespeare and must have been in his mind since boyhood, and that they affect the play slightly in a constructive way, but are rather the dressings of thought and action; they may readily be recognized by the ordinary reader.

The conduct of the action in the murder scene, iv, iii, throughout is modeled on the murder of Duncan, *Macbeth*, ii, ii. Count Cenci in his invocation, i, i, 140, recalls *Macbeth*, ii, i, 56, and in his appeal to night, ii, i, 181; *Macbeth*, iii, ii, 46; in his blithe bearing in the feast scene, i, iii, 16, he recalls *Richard III*, iii, iv, 50, and in the curse scene, *King Lear*, i, iv, 275, and ii, iv, 160. Beatrice, in the mad scene, iii, i, 43, recalls Clarence's dream, *Richard III*, i, iv, 9, and again iii, i, 64, Constance, *King John*, iii, iv, 45; in the discovery scene, iv, iv, 48, *Macbeth*, iii, iv, 21; and in the trial scene, v, ii, 78, *Richard III*, i, iv, 177, and again v, iv, 48, *Measure for Measure*, iii, i, 119. Giacomo, in the image of the lamp, iii, ii, 9, repeats *Othello*, v, ii, 8, and recalls in the second line of his speech the storm in *Lear*; brief snatches of Shakespearean diction occur throughout the scene. Orsino, ii, ii, 133, recalls *King John*, iii, iv, 94, and in the same scene, 147, *Richard III*, ii, iv, 54. Camillo, i, i, 39, recalls

Henry IV, Pt. 2, v, v, 49. Similar instances of Shakespearean phrasing or echo occur in III, i, 176, *Sonnets*, cxi; III, ii, 57, *Hamlet*, III, i, 74; v, i, 120, *King John*, IV, ii, 220; v, iv, 80, *Hamlet*, I, ii, 133; but such a list of minute resemblances and suggestions might be extended indefinitely. The play is thus veined with Shakespeare, and the language of Shelley is often the mere shadow of Shakespeare's thought.

These borrowings and reminiscences, however numerous, make up only a small portion of the entire text, but they give to it a Shakespearean tone and differentiate the play from Shelley's other works in general style. Shelley's personal style is easily recognized both in its poetic and dramatic form; an example of the former is found in III, i, 170-172, which might have come out of *Prometheus Unbound*, or in the same scene, 50-54, or 108-111; an example of the latter is v, iv, 87-88, or in the same scene, Bernardo's speech, 121 ff., and Beatrice's, 141 ff. The play is made of style and diction of this texture through which the Shakespearean threads are shot. It appears, to the editor at least, that the debt of Shelley to Shakespeare in the dramatic handling of scene and character is also superficial. It is confined to the handling and does not affect the characterization itself. It is true that Count Cenci recalls King Richard III by his blitheness and by the presence of the religious element (though differently conceived), and also Macbeth by his invocations, in language, and Lear by the fact and violence of his curse; but he is not a compound of these characters any more than Beatrice is of Constance, Clarence, Macbeth and Hamlet,

whose words or manner she employs. Both characters are creations of Shelley, original and entire, in the combination of qualities that makes vitality and in the reaction on life that expresses it. Count Cenci is delineated by three traits, his masterless will, his loathing for beauty and goodness, and his faith in a vengeful God. There is no character in Shakespeare in whom any one of these traits is depicted, much less their combination. Beatrice likewise is a character who owes nothing to any other in literature and is unparalleled by any other; she is a new type of suffering, mingled with courage, endurance and tenderness, and expressed in new circumstances of pity and terror. Camillo is admirably drawn, and Bernardo in the last scenes is pathetic and real, while Giacomo and Orsino, though overstudied for the parts they play, are carefully delineated in motive and temperament. The character drawing, in fact, which is the strength of the play, owes nothing to Shakespeare; neither do the dramatic climaxes, namely, the braving of Count Cenci by Beatrice, the opening lines of the mad scene and the silent formation by Beatrice of the resolve on Count Cenci's death, the speech of Count Cenci — "He does his will, I mine," and his exit speech, the slumber of Beatrice in the last act, and the final much admired exit speech at the close of the play, which is in the great style of dramatic art. In all these, which with the characters make the play, Shelley is altogether himself; no other has any part in them, constructively or in expression. The Shakespearean element occurs most in the weakest portions of the play and is a source of weakness, except so far as it affords the support of a

noble diction where the action lags. Shakespeare contributed to the play general conduct of the murder scene and suggestions for the dramatic exhibition of character in other scenes, mainly in language; and, *passim*, an investiture of phrase or image that supports the style, and more rarely a form of thought for situations that are as old as drama. Such forms of thought can be paralleled from any literature; thus Lewes in noticing Beatrice's reminiscence of Claudio's speech on death refers to Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*. The originality of the play lies in creative power applied to character in a new action; in this the Shakespearean element is subordinate and incidental, and is rather a color of Shelley's mind than a constituent of the play.

4. STAGE HISTORY

Shelley was not greatly interested in the theatre, nor did he attempt serious dramatic writing till a comparatively late period of his poetic career. In his boyhood at Eton he is said to have composed dramatic scenes with a schoolmate and to have acted them before a third lower-form boy in the same house, and also his sister Helen reports that he sent a play to Matthews, the comedian. He thought that he had little faculty for the construction of a story, holding himself inferior in this to his wife, Mary. In writing *The Cenci*, however, he kept the acting quality of the play in mind and adopted a style of singular restraint; the diction is, in fact, noble, poetic, and severe. It is plain also that in certain parts of the play he had in mind something seen as well

as told, and wrote with regard to visible dramatic effect. As he warmed with the composition, his hopes rose; what they were and the steps he took in consequence are best described by Mrs. Shelley in her note to the play:

“Shelley wished *The Cenci* to be acted. He was not a play-goer, being of such fastidious taste that he was easily disgusted by the bad filling up of the inferior parts. While preparing for our departure from England, however, he saw Miss O’Neil several times; she was then in the zenith of her glory, and Shelley was deeply moved by her impersonation of several parts, and by the graceful sweetness, the intense pathos, and sublime vehemence of passion she displayed. She was often in his thoughts as he wrote, and when he had finished, he became anxious that his tragedy should be acted, and receive the advantage of having this accomplished actress to fill the part of the heroine. With this view he wrote the following letter to a friend [Peacock, July, 1819] in London:

“‘The object of the present letter is to ask a favor of you. I have written a tragedy on the subject of a story well known in Italy, and, in my conception, eminently dramatic. I have taken some pains to make my play fit for representation, and those who have already seen it judge favorably. It is written without any of the peculiar feelings and opinions which characterize my other compositions; I having attended simply to the impartial development of such characters as it is probable the persons represented really were, together with the greatest degree of popular effect to be produced by such a development. I send you a translation of the Italian MS. on which my play is founded; the chief subject of which I have touched very delicately; for my principal doubt as to whether it would succeed, as an acting play, hangs entirely on the question,

as to whether such a thing as incest in this shape, however treated, would be admitted on the stage. I think, however, it will form no objection, considering, first, that the facts are matter of history and, secondly, the peculiar delicacy with which I have treated it.

“‘I am exceedingly interested in the question of whether this attempt of mine will succeed or no. I am strongly inclined to the affirmative at present; founding my hopes on this, that as a composition it is certainly not inferior to any of the modern plays that have been acted, with the exception of *Remorse*; that the interest of its plot is incredibly greater and more real, and that there is nothing beyond what the multitude are contented to believe that they can understand, either in imagery, opinion, or sentiment. I wish to preserve a complete incognito, and can trust to you that, whatever else you do, you will at least favor me on this point. Indeed this is essential, deeply essential to its success. After it had been acted, and successfully (could I hope such a thing), I would own it if I pleased, and use the celebrity it might acquire, to my own purposes.

“‘What I want you to do, is to procure for me its presentation at Covent Garden. The principal character, Beatrice, is precisely fitted for Miss O’Neil, and it might even seem written for her, (God forbid that I should ever see her play it—it would tear my nerves to pieces,) and in all respects it is fitted only for Covent Garden. The chief male character I confess I should be very unwilling that any one but Kean should play—that is impossible, and I must be contented with an inferior actor.’”¹

Peacock accordingly offered the play at Covent Garden, but it was declined; the manager refused to sub-

¹ Mrs. Shelley’s ed. *loc. cit.*

mit it to Miss O'Neil. Peacock doubted whether the licenser would have permitted the performance, even had it been accepted. The rest of his note (*Works*, III, 465-66) is apposite. "The *Ædipus* of Dryden and Lee was often performed in the last century; but never in my time. There is no subject of this class treated with such infinite skill and delicacy as in Alfieri's beautiful tragedy, *Mirra*. It was the character in which Madame Ristori achieved her greatness in Paris; but she was prohibited from performing it in London." Shelley was disappointed. The latest expression of his view is given in a letter to Medwin, July 20, 1820: "As to Cenci's curse I know not whether I can defend it or no. I wish I may be able; and, as it often happens respecting the worst part of an author's work, it is a particular favorite with me. I prided myself — as since your approbation I hope that I had just cause to do — upon the two concluding lines of the play. I confess I cannot approve of the squeamishness which excludes the exhibition of such *subjects* from the scene — a squeamishness the produce, as I firmly believe, of a lower tone of the public mind, and foreign to the majestic and confident wisdom of the golden age of our country."¹

After Shelley's death and in the growth of his fame the play continuously excited the attention of the stage. Macready considered it, as did also Samuel Phelps, who took the poet, R. H. Horne, into consultation; and Miss Genevieve Ward planned to give a private performance. It was finally brought out under the auspices of the Shelley Society, at a private performance, and acted

¹ Trelawney, *Records*, ii, 37-38.

at the Grand Theatre, Islington, in the afternoon, May 7, 1886. There was an audience of 2400 persons; Lowell, Browning and Meredith, besides many others eminent in literature, the drama and the arts, were present; both as respects the representation and the audience, it was given under the most favorable conditions. It was given entire, and without change except that the Third Act was cut into two for convenience, and it occupied four hours in performance. The cast was excellent. The characters of Count Cenci and Beatrice were taken by Hermann Vezin and Miss Alma Murray; both increased their reputation by their acting of the parts, and by their rendering proved the masterly power of the poet's characterization. The parts are histrionically difficult and a tax on the endurance of the players. Beatrice speaks over one third of the total lines of the play, and Count Cenci about one sixth. In both cases the characters gained by the acting, owing to the filling in, at dramatic moments, of the silent action. The most effective scenes were, it is plain, the feast scene, the mad scene, and the scene of the curse. The play held attention only through these two characters, and won favor partly by the intensity and demoniac quality of Count Cenci, but more by the pathos and wrongs of Beatrice, who is described as "the only character as telling on the stage as in the study." Mr. Vezin conceived Count Cenci, as a patrician preserving his high-bred dignity throughout his most extreme outbreaks, and embodying a *crescendo* of passion, finding its climax in the last imprecation; the part is said to have lifted the actor out of himself. Miss Murray's interpretation was received

and commented on with still greater enthusiasm. The general verdict appears to have been that the play would require to be cut and adapted, if it were to be put regularly on the boards; that the theme, though repulsive, was saved by the power of the acting; and that the strength of the play lies in its characterization. It is a play, therefore, only for an actress of genius. Upon the centenary of Shelley, August 4, 1892, it was hoped that a second commemorative performance might be given, but such difficulty was found in obtaining a theatre that the plan was abandoned.

THE TEXT

Two editions of the play were published in Shelley's lifetime and both are necessary to the text. The *editio princeps* is *The Cenci. A Tragedy, in Five Acts. By Percy B. Shelley. Italy. Printed for C. and J. Ollier. Vere Street, Bond Street. London. 1819.* This was printed under Shelley's direction and sent to Ollier. Shelley wrote (April 30, 1820) to Ollier: "I send a list of errata; the incorrectness of the forms of typography, &c. which are considerably numerous, you will be so obliging as to attend to yourself." This list, in Mrs. Shelley's hand, is published by Forman, *The Shelley Library*, 1886, p. 91. It was embodied in the Second Edition, and other minor changes were made in accordance with Shelley's request as above, so that the two editions vary in typographical detail. The title-page of the Second Edition is as follows: *The Cenci A Tragedy in Five Acts by Percy Bysshe Shelley Second Edition London C and J Ollier Vere Street Bond Street 1821.* The text here given follows, except as noted in the variants, the Second Edition, — even in pointing and capitalization, as well as verbally; Forman's text follows the pointing of 1819, and better represents Shelley's personal habit of punctuation, but by his letter to Ollier Shelley authorized the changes made in this regard. Therefore, in the text proper, it has seemed best not to normalize or modernize capitals and punctuation. On the other hand, though in the Second Edition the names of the speakers are abbreviated throughout, in this edition, in accordance with the practice of the *Belles-Lettres Series*, each name is printed in full when a character first speaks in a scene, and is abbreviated thereafter. The capitalization and the punctuation of the stage-directions of the 1821 Edition are so erratic that in this text they have been normalized. There has been no attempt to keep the exact placing at left, or centre, on the page, of stage-directions, but where possible they have been drawn into the lines affected. No manuscript of the play is known; but the Garnett Shelley Note-book II contains the preface, and an abstract of narratives concerning the Cenci family.

THE CENCI

A TRAGEDY

IN FIVE ACTS

BY

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

SECOND EDITION

LONDON

C AND J OLLIER VERE STREET BOND STREET

1821

SOURCES

For the sources of *The Cenci* see the *Preface* of Shelley (pp. 5-12) and *Appendix*.

DEDICATION
TO
LEIGH HUNT, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I inscribe with your name, from a distant country, and after an absence whose months have seemed years, this the latest of my literary efforts.

Those writings which I have hitherto published, have been little else than visions which impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just. I can also perceive in them the literary defects incidental to youth and impatience; they are dreams of what ought to be, or may be. The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been.

Had I known a person more highly endowed than yourself with all that it becomes a man to possess, I had solicited for this work the ornament of his name. One more gentle, honourable, innocent, and brave; one of more exalted toleration for all who do and think evil, and yet himself more free from evil; one who knows better how to receive, and how to confer a benefit, though he must ever confer far more than he can receive; one of simpler, and, in the highest sense of the word, of purer life and man-

ners, I never knew : and I had already been fortunate in friendships when your name was added to the list.

In that patient and irreconcilable enmity with domestic and political tyranny and imposture, which the tenor of your life has illustrated, and which, had I health and talents, should illustrate mine, let us, comforting each other in our task, live and die.

All happiness attend you!

Your affectionate friend,

PERCY B. SHELLEY.

ROME,

May 29, 1819.

PREFACE

A MANUSCRIPT was communicated to me during my travels in Italy, which was copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace at Rome, and contains a detailed account of the horrors which ended in the extinction of one of the noblest and richest families of that city, during the Pontificate of Clement VIII. in the year 1599. The story is, that an old man having spent his life in debauchery and wickedness, conceived at length an implacable hatred towards his children; which showed itself towards one daughter under the form of an incestuous passion, aggravated by every circumstance of cruelty and violence. This daughter, after long and vain attempts to escape from what she considered a perpetual contamination both of body and mind, at length plotted with her mother-in-law and brother to murder their common tyrant. The young maiden, who was urged to this tremendous deed by an impulse which overpowered its horror, was evidently a most gentle and amiable being, a creature formed to adorn and be admired, and thus violently thwarted from her nature by the necessity of circumstance and opinion. The deed was quickly discovered, and, in spite of the most earnest prayers made to the Pope by the highest persons in Rome, the criminals were put to death. The old man had, during his life, repeatedly bought his pardon from the Pope for capital crimes of the most enormous and unspeakable kind, at the price of a hundred thou-

sand crowns ; the death therefore of his victims can scarcely be accounted for by the love of justice. The Pope, among other motives for severity, probably felt that whoever killed the Count Cenci, deprived his treasury of a certain and copious source of revenue.¹ Such a story, if told so as to present to the reader all the feelings of those who once acted it, their hopes and fears, their confidences and misgivings, their various interests, passions and opinions, acting upon and with each other, yet all conspiring to one tremendous end, would be as a light to make apparent some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart.

On my arrival at Rome, I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest; and that the feelings of the company never failed to incline to a romantic pity for the wrongs, and a passionate exculpation of the horrible deed to which they urged her, who has been mingled two centuries with the common dust. All ranks of people knew the outlines of this history, and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart. I had a copy of Guido's picture of Beatrice which is preserved in the Colonna Palace, and my servant instantly recognized it as the portrait of *La Cenci*.

¹ The Papal Government formerly took the most extraordinary precautions against the publicity of facts which offer so tragical a demonstration of its own wickedness and weakness ; so that the communication of the MS. had become, until very lately, a matter of some difficulty.

This national and universal interest which the story produces and has produced for two centuries, and among all ranks of people in a great City, where the imagination is kept forever active and awake, first suggested to me the conception of its fitness for a dramatic purpose. In fact it is a tragedy which has already received, from its capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men, approbation and success. Nothing remained, as I imagined, but to clothe it to the apprehensions of my countrymen in such language and action as would bring it home to their hearts. The deepest and the sublimest tragic compositions, King Lear and the two plays in which the tale of *Œdipus* is told, were stories which already existed in tradition, as matters of popular belief and interest, before Shakespeare and Sophocles made them familiar to the sympathy of all succeeding generations of mankind.

This story of the Cenci is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous: any thing like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal, and diminish the actual horror of the events, so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which they spring. There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion

to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: the few whom such an exhibition would have interested, could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered, consists.

I have endeavoured as nearly as possible to represent the characters as they probably were, and have sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by my own conceptions of right or wrong, false or true: thus under a thin veil converting names and actions of the sixteenth century into cold impersonations of my own mind. They are represented as Catholics, and as Catholics deeply tinged with religion. To a Protestant apprehension there will appear something unnatural in the ear-

nest and perpetual sentiment of the relations between God and man which pervade the tragedy of the Cenci. It will especially be startled at the combination of an undoubting persuasion of the truth of the popular religion with a cool and determined perseverance in enormous guilt. But religion in Italy is not, as in Protestant countries, a cloak to be worn on particular days; or a passport which those who do not wish to be railed at carry with them to exhibit; or a gloomy passion for penetrating the impenetrable mysteries of our being, which terrifies its possessor at the darkness of the abyss to the brink of which it has conducted him. Religion coexists, as it were, in the mind of an Italian Catholic, with a faith in that of which all men have the most certain knowledge. It is interwoven with the whole fabric of life. It is adoration, faith, submission, penitence, blind admiration; not a rule for moral conduct. It has no necessary connection with any one virtue. The most atrocious villain may be rigidly devout, and without any shock to established faith, confess himself to be so. Religion pervades intensely the whole frame of society, and is, according to the temper of the mind which it inhabits, a passion, a persuasion, an excuse, a refuge; never a check. Cenci himself built a chapel in the court of his Palace, and dedicated it to St. Thomas the Apostle, and established masses for the peace of his soul. Thus in the first scene of the fourth act Lucretia's design in exposing herself to the consequences of an expostulation with Cenci after having administered the opiate, was to induce him by a feigned tale to confess himself before death; this being

esteemed by Catholics as essential to salvation; and she only relinquishes her purpose when she perceives that her perseverance would expose Beatrice to new outrages.

I have avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry, and I imagine there will scarcely be found a detached simile or a single isolated description, unless Beatrice's description of the chasm appointed for her father's murder should be judged to be of that nature.¹

In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full developement and illustration of the latter. Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion. It is thus that the most remote and the most familiar imagery may alike be fit for dramatic purposes when employed in the illustration of strong feeling, which raises what is low, and levels to the apprehension that which is lofty, casting over all the shadow of its own greatness. In other respects I have written more carelessly; that is, without an over-fastidious and learned choice of words. In this respect I entirely agree with those modern critics who assert that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men. And that our great ancestors the ancient English poets are the writers, a study of whom might incite us to do that for our own age which they have

¹ An idea in this speech was suggested by a most sublime passage in "El Purgatorio de San Patricio" of Calderon; the only plagiarism which I have intentionally committed in the whole piece.

done for theirs. But it must be the real language of men in general, and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong. So much for what I have attempted; I need not be assured that success is a very different matter; particularly for one whose attention has but newly been awakened to the study of dramatic literature.

I endeavoured whilst at Rome to observe such monuments of this story as might be accessible to a stranger. The portrait of Beatrice at the Colonna Palace is admirable as a work of art: it was taken by Guido during her confinement in prison. But it is most interesting as a just representation of one of the loveliest specimens of the workmanship of Nature. There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features: she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness. Her head is bound with folds of white drapery from which the yellow strings of her golden hair escape, and fall about her neck. The moulding of her face is exquisitely delicate; the eyebrows are distinct and arched; the lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed and which it seems as if death scarcely could extinguish. Her forehead is large and clear; her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene. In the whole mien there is a simplicity and dignity which united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow are inexpressibly pathetic. Beatrice Cenci appears to have been one of those rare persons in whom energy and

gentleness dwell together without destroying one another: her nature was simple and profound. The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and the mantle in which circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world.

The Cenci Palace is of great extent; and, though in part modernized, there yet remains a vast and gloomy pile of feudal architecture in the same state as during the dreadful scenes which are the subject of this tragedy. The Palace is situated in an obscure corner of Rome, near the quarter of the Jews, and from the upper windows you see the immense ruins of Mount Palatine half hidden under their profuse overgrowth of trees. There is a court in one part of the Palace (perhaps that in which Cenci built the Chapel to St. Thomas), supported by granite columns and adorned with antique friezes of fine workmanship, and built up according to the ancient Italian fashion, with balcony over balcony of open-work. One of the gates of the Palace, formed of immense stones, and leading through a passage, dark and lofty, and opening into gloomy subterranean chambers, struck me particularly.

Of the Castle of Petrella, I could obtain no further information than that which is to be found in the manuscript.

The Cenci

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

COUNT FRANCESCO CENCI.

GIACOMO, }
BERNARDO, } his Sons.

CARDINAL CAMILLO.

[PRINCE COLONNA.]

ORSINO, a Prelate.

SAVELLA, the Pope's Legate.

OLIMPIO, }
MARZIO, } Assassins.

ANDREA, Servant to Cenci.

Nobles, Judges, Guards, Servants.

LUCRETIA, Wife of Cenci, and Step-mother
of his Children.

BEATRICE, his Daughter.

The SCENE lies principally in Rome, but changes during the Fourth Act to Petrella, a castle among the Apulian Apennines.

TIME. During the Pontificate of Clement VIII.

Prince Colonna. 1819, 1821 omit.

The Cenci

ACT I.

SCENE I. *An Apartment in the Cenci Palace. Enter Count Cenci, and Cardinal Camillo.*

Camillo. That matter of the murder is hushed
• up

If you consent to yield his Holiness
Your fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate.
It needed all my interest in the conclave
To bend him to this point: he said that you 5
Bought perilous impunity with your gold;
That crimes like yours if once or twice com-
pounded
Enriched the Church, and respited from hell
An erring soul which might repent and live;
But that the glory and the interest 10
Of the high throne he fills, little consist
With making it a daily mart of guilt
As manifold and hideous as the deeds
Which you scarce hide from men's revolted eyes.

Cenci. The third of my possessions—let it go! 15
Ay, I once heard the nephew of the Pope
Had sent his architect to view the ground,

Meaning to build a villa on my vines
The next time I compounded with his uncle:
I little thought he should outwit me so! 20
Henceforth no witness — not the lamp — shall
see

That which the vassal threatened to divulge,
Whose throat is choked with dust for his reward.
The deed he saw could not have rated higher
[Than] his most worthless life: — it angers me! 25
Respited me from Hell! — So may the Devil
Respite their souls from Heaven. No doubt Pope
Clement,

And his most charitable nephews, pray
That the Apostle Peter and the saints
Will grant for their sake that I long enjoy 30
Strength, wealth, and pride, and lust, and length
of days

Wherein to act the deeds which are the stewards
Of their revenue. — But much yet remains
To which they shew no title.

Cam. Oh, Count Cenci!

So much that thou mightst honourably live 35
And reconcile thyself with thine own heart
And with thy God, and with the offended world.
How hideously look deeds of lust and blood
Thro' those snow white and venerable hairs!

25 *Than*, Mrs. Shelley, 1839; *That*, 1819, 1821.

26 *me*. 1819 omits.

Your children should be sitting round you now, 40
But that you fear to read upon their looks
The shame and misery you have written there.
Where is your wife? Where is your gentle
daughter?

Methinks her sweet looks, which make all things
else

Beauteous and glad, might kill the fiend within
you. 45

Why is she barred from all society
But her own strange and uncomplaining wrongs?
Talk with me, Count, — you know I mean you
well.

I stood beside your dark and fiery youth
Watching its bold and bad career, as men 50
Watch meteors, but it vanished not: I marked
Your desperate and remorseless manhood; now
Do I behold you, in dishonoured age,
Charged with a thousand unrepented crimes.
Yet I have ever hoped you would amend, 55
And in that hope have saved your life three times.

Cen. For which Aldobrandino owes you now
My fief beyond the Pincian. Cardinal,
One thing, I pray you, recollect henceforth,
And so we shall converse with less restraint. 60
A man you knew spoke of my wife and daughter:
He was accustomed to frequent my house;
So the next day *his* wife and daughter came

And asked if I had seen him ; and I smiled :
I think they never saw him any more. 65

Cam. Thou execrable man, beware ! —

Cen. Of thee ?

Nay, this is idle : we should know each other.
As to my character for what men call crime,
Seeing I please my senses as I list,
And vindicate that right with force or guile, 70
It is a public matter, and I care not
If I discuss it with you. I may speak
Alike to you and my own conscious heart ;
For you give out that you have half reformed me,
Therefore strong vanity will keep you silent 75
If fear should not ; both will, I do not doubt.

All men delight in sensual luxury,
All men enjoy revenge ; and most exult
Over the tortures they can never feel ;
Flattering their secret peace with others' pain. 80
But I delight in nothing else. I love.

The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,
When this shall be another's and that mine.
And I have no remorse and little fear,
Which are, I think, the checks of other men. 85
This mood has grown upon me, until now
Any design my captious fancy makes
The picture of its wish, and it forms none
But such as men like you would start to know,
Is as my natural food and rest debarred 90

Until it be accomplished.

Cam. Art thou not
Most miserable?

Cen. Why miserable? —
No. I am what your theologians call
Hardened; which they must be in impudence,
So to revile a man's peculiar taste. 95
True, I was happier than I am, while yet
Manhood remained to act the thing I thought;
While lust was sweeter than revenge; and now
Invention palls: ay, we must all grow old:
And but that there yet remains a deed to act 100
Whose horror might make sharp an appetite
Duller than mine — I'd do, — I know not what.
When I was young I thought of nothing else
But pleasure; and I fed on honey sweets:
Men, by St. Thomas! cannot live like bees, 105
And I grew tired: yet, till I killed a foe,
And heard his groans, and heard his children's
groans,
Knew I not what delight was else on earth,
Which now delights me little. I the rather
Look on such pangs as terror ill conceals: 110
The dry, fixed eyeball; the pale, quivering lip,
Which tell me that the spirit weeps within
Tears bitterer than the bloody sweat of Christ.
I rarely kill the body, which preserves,

100 *And.* 1819 omits.

Like a strong prison, the soul within my power, 115
Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear
For hourly pain.

Cam. Hell's most abandoned fiend
Did never, in the drunkenness of guilt,
Speak to his heart as now you speak to me;
I thank my God that I believe you not. 120

Enter Andrea.

Andrea. My Lord, a gentleman from Salamanca
Would speak with you.

Gen. Bid him attend me
In the grand saloon. (*Exit Andrea.*)

Cam. Farewell; and I will pray
Almighty God that thy false, impious words,
Tempt not his spirit to abandon thee. 125

(*Exit Camillo.*)

Gen. The third of my possessions! I must use
Close husbandry, or gold, the old man's sword,
Falls from my withered hand. But yesterday
There came an order from the Pope to make
Fourfold provision for my cursed sons, 130
Whom I had sent from Rome to Salamanca,
Hoping some accident might cut them off;
And meaning if I could to starve them there.
I pray thee, God, send some quick death upon
them!

122-3 *Bid . . . saloon.* One line in 1819, 1821.

131 *had.* 1819, have.

Bernardo and my wife could not be worse 135
 If dead and damned : then, as to Beatrice —

(*Looking around him suspiciously.*)

I think they cannot hear me at that door ;
 What if they should ? And yet I need not speak,
 Though the heart triumphs with itself in words.
 O, thou most silent air, that shalt not hear 140
 What now I think ! Thou, pavement, which I
 tread

Towards her chamber, — let your echoes talk
 Of my imperious step, scorning surprise,
 But not of my intent ! Andrea !

Enter Andrea.

Andr. My Lord !

Cen. Bid Beatrice attend me in her chamber 145
 This evening : — no, at midnight, and alone.
 (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II. *A Garden of the Cenci Palace. Enter Beatrice and Orsino, as in conversation.*

Beatrice. Pervert not truth,
 Orsino. You remember where we held
 That conversation ; — nay, we see the spot
 Even from this cypress ; — two long years are
 past

Since, on an April midnight, underneath 5
 The moonlight ruins of mount Palatine,

140 *shalt.* 1819, shall.

I did confess to you my secret mind.

Orsino. You said you loved me then.

Beatr. You are a priest,
Speak to me not of love.

Ors. I may obtain
The dispensation of the Pope to marry. 10
Because I am a priest do you believe
Your image, as the hunter some struck deer,
Follows me not whether I wake or sleep?

Beatr. As I have said, speak to me not of
love;

Had you a dispensation, I have not ; 15

Nor will I leave this home of misery
Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
To whom I owe life and these virtuous thoughts,
Must suffer what I still have strength to share.
Alas, Orsino ! All the love that once 20
I felt for you, is turned to bitter pain.

Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
Broke, by assuming vows no Pope will loose.
And thus I love you still, but holily,
Even as a sister or a spirit might ; 25
And so I swear a cold fidelity.

And it is well perhaps we shall not marry.
You have a sly, equivocating vein
That suits me not. Ah, wretched that I am !
Where shall I turn ? Even now you look on me 30

As you were not my friend, and as if you
Discovered that I thought so, with false smiles
Making my true suspicion seem your wrong.
Ah! No, forgive me; sorrow makes me seem
Stern than else my nature might have been; 35
I have a weight of melancholy thoughts,
And they forebode, — but what can they fore-
bode

Worse than I now endure?

Ors. All will be well.

Is the petition yet prepared? You know
My zeal for all you wish, sweet Beatrice; 40
Doubt not but I will use my utmost skill,
So that the Pope attend to your complaint.

Beatr. Your zeal for all I wish; Ah me, you
are cold!

Your utmost skill — speak but one word —
(*Aside.*) Alas!

Weak and deserted creature that I am, 45
Here I stand bickering with my only friend!
(*To Orsino.*) This night my father gives a sump-
tuous feast,

Orsino; he has heard some happy news
From Salamanca, from my brothers there,
And with this outward shew of love he mocks 50
His inward hate. 'Tis bold hypocrisy,
For he would gladlier celebrate their deaths,
Which I have heard him pray for on his knees:

Great God ! that such a father should be mine !
But there is mighty preparation made, 55
And all our kin, the Cenci, will be there,
And all the chief nobility of Rome.
And he has bidden me and my pale mother
Attire ourselves in festival array.
Poor lady ! She expects some happy change 60
In his dark spirit from this act ; I none.
At supper I will give you the petition :
Till when — farewell.

Ors. Farewell. (*Exit Beatrice.*) I know
the Pope

Will ne'er absolve me from my priestly vow
But by absolving me from the revenue 65
Of many a wealthy see ; and, Beatrice,
I think to win thee at an easier rate.
Nor shall he read her eloquent petition :
He might bestow her on some poor relation
Of his sixth cousin, as he did her sister, 70
And I should be debarred from all access.
Then as to what she suffers from her father,
In all this there is much exaggeration :
Old men are testy and will have their way ;
A man may stab his enemy, or his vassal, 75
And live a free life as to wine or women,
And with a peevish temper may return
To a dull home, and rate his wife and children ;

75 *vassal*. 1819, *slave*.

Daughters and wives call this foul tyranny.
I shall be well content, if on my conscience 80
There rest no heavier sin than what they suffer
From the devices of my love — A net
From which she shall escape not. Yet I fear
Her subtle mind, her awe-inspiring gaze,
Whose beams anatomize me, nerve by nerve, 85
And lay me bare, and make me blush to see
My hidden thoughts. — Ah, no ! A friendless girl
Who clings to me, as to her only hope : —
I were a fool, not less than if a panther
Were panic-stricken by the antelope's eye, 90
If she escapes me. (Exit.)

SCENE III. *A magnificent Hall in the Cenci Palace. A Banquet. Enter Cenci, Lucretia, Beatrice, Orsino, Camillo, Nobles.*

Cenci. Welcome, my friends and kinsmen ;
welcome ye
Princes and Cardinals, pillars of the church,
Whose presence honours our festivity.
I have too long lived like an anchorite,
And, in my absence from your merry meetings, 5
An evil word is gone abroad of me :
But I do hope that you, my noble friends,
When you have shared the entertainment here,
And heard the pious cause for which 'tis given,
And we have pledged a health or two together, 10

Will think me flesh and blood as well **as you**;
Sinful indeed, for Adam made all so,
But tender-hearted, meek and pitiful.

1. *Guest.* In truth, my Lord, you **seem** too
light of heart,
Too sprightly and companionable a **man**, 15
To act the deeds that rumour pins on **you**.
(*To his companion.*) I never saw such **blithe** and
open cheer
In any eye!

2. *Guest.* Some most desired **event**,
In which we all demand a common joy,
Has brought us hither; let us hear it, **Count.** 20

Cen. It is indeed a most desired event.
If, when a parent, from a parent's heart,
Lifts from this earth to the great father **of all**
A prayer, both when he lays him down **to sleep**
And when he rises up from dreaming it; 25
One supplication, one desire, one hope,
That he would grant a wish for his **two sons**,
Even all that he demands in their regard —
And suddenly, beyond his dearest hope,
It is accomplished, he should then **rejoice**, 30
And call his friends and kinsmen to a **feast**,
And task their love to grace his merriment,
Then honour me thus far — for I am **he**.

Beatrice (to Lucretia). Great God! **How hor-**
rible! Some dreadful ill
Must have befallen my brothers.

Lucretia. Fear not, child, 35
He speaks too frankly.

Beatr. Ah! My blood runs cold.
I fear that wicked laughter round his eye,
Which wrinkles up the skin even to the hair.

Cen. Here are the letters brought from Salamanca ;
Beatrice, read them to your mother. God, 40
I thank thee! In one night didst thou perform,
By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought.
My disobedient and rebellious sons
Are dead! — Why dead! — What means this
change of cheer?

You hear me not, I tell you they are dead; 45
And they will need no food or raiment more:
The tapers that did light them the dark way
Are their last cost. The Pope, I think, will not
Expect I should maintain them in their coffins.
Rejoice with me, my heart is wondrous glad. 50

Beatr. (Lucretia sinks, half fainting; Beatrice supports her.) It is not true! — Dear
lady, pray look up.

Had it been true, there is a God in Heaven,
He would not live to boast of such a boon.
Unnatural man, thou knowest that it is false.

Cen. Ay, as the word of God; whom here
I call 55
To witness that I speak the sober truth;

44 *Why dead.* Evidently, *Why, dead.*

And whose most favouring Providence was shewn
Even in the manner of their deaths. For Rocco
Was kneeling at the mass, with sixteen others,
When the church fell and crushed him to a
mummy ; 60

The rest escaped unhurt. Cristofano
Was stabbed in error by a jealous man,
Whilst she he loved was sleeping with his rival ;
All in the self-same hour of the same night ;
Which shews that Heaven has special care of me. 65
I beg those friends who love me, that they mark
The day a feast upon their calendars.
It was the twenty-seventh of December :
Ay, read the letters if you doubt my oath.

*(The assembly appears confused ; several of
the guests rise.)*

1. Guest. Oh, horrible ! I will depart.

2. Guest. And I.

3. Guest. No, stay ! 70

I do believe it is some jest ; though faith,
'Tis mocking us somewhat too solemnly.
I think his son has married the Infanta,
Or found a mine of gold in El dorado ;
'Tis but to season some such news ; stay, stay ! 75
I see 'tis only raillery by his smile.

Cen. *(filling a bowl of wine, and lifting it up)*. Oh,
thou bright wine, whose purple splen-
dour leaps

And bubbles gaily in this golden bowl

Under the lamp-light, as my spirits do,
To hear the death of my accursed sons! 80
Could I believe thou wert their mingled blood,
Then would I taste thee like a sacrament,
And pledge with thee the mighty Devil in Hell;
Who, if a father's curses, as men say,
Climb with swift wings after their children's souls, 85
And drag them from the very throne of Heaven,
Now triumphs in my triumph! — But thou art
Superfluous; I have drunken deep of joy,
And I will taste no other wine to-night.
Here, Andrea! Bear the bowl around.

A Guest (rising). Thou wretch ! 90
Will none among this noble company
Check the abandoned villain ?

Camillo. For God's sake,
Let me dismiss the guests! You are insane,
Some ill will come of this.

2. *Guest.* Seize, silence him!

1. *Guest.* I will !

3. *Guest.* And I!

Gen. (addressing those who rise with a threatening gesture). Who moves? Who speaks? (Turning to the company.) 'Tis nothing, 95
Enjoy yourselves. — Beware! for my revenge
Is as the sealed commission of a king,
That kills, and none dare name the murderer.

(The banquet is broken up; several of the guests are departing.)

Beatr. I do entreat you, go not, noble guests;
What, although tyranny and impious hate 100
Stand sheltered by a father's hoary hair?
What, if 'tis he who clothed us in these limbs
Who tortures them, and triumphs? What, if we,
The desolate and the dead, were his own flesh,
His children and his wife, whom he is bound 105
To love and shelter? Shall we therefore find
No refuge in this merciless wide world?
Oh, think what deep wrongs must have blotted
out
First love, then reverence in a child's prone
mind,
Till it thus vanquish shame and fear! O, think! 110
I have borne much, and kissed the sacred hand
Which crushed us to the earth, and thought its
stroke
Was perhaps some paternal chastisement!
Have excused much, doubted; and when no
doubt
Remained, have sought by patience, love and
tears, 115
To soften him; and when this could not be,
I have knelt down through the long sleepless
nights,
And lifted up to God, the father of all,
Passionate prayers: and when these were not
heard

I have still borne ; — until I meet you here, 120
Princes and kinsmen, at this hideous feast
Given at my brothers' deaths. Two yet remain,
His wife remains and I, whom if ye save not,
Ye may soon share such merriment again
As fathers make over their children's graves. 125
Oh ! Prince Colonna, thou art our near kinsman ;
Cardinal, thou art the Pope's chamberlain ;
Camillo, thou art chief justiciary ;
Take us away !

Cen. (*He has been conversing with Camillo during the first part of Beatrice's speech ; he hears the conclusion, and now advances.*) I
hope my good friends here

Will think of their own daughters — or perhaps 130
Of their own throats — before they lend an ear
To this wild girl.

Beatr. (*not noticing the words of Cenci*). Dare
no one look on me ?

None answer ? Can one tyrant overbear
The sense of many best and wisest men ?
Or is it that I sue not in some form 135
Of scrupulous law, that ye deny my suit ?
Oh, God ! That I were buried with my brothers !
And that the flowers of this departed spring
Were fading on my grave ! And that my father
Were celebrating now one feast for all ! 140

Cam. A bitter wish for one so young and gentle ;

Can we do nothing ?

Colonna.

Nothing that I see.

Count Cenci were a dangerous enemy :

Yet I would second any one.

A Cardinal.

And I.

Cen. Retire to your chamber, insolent girl !

Beatr. Retire thou, impious man ! Ay, hide thyself

Where never eye can look upon thee more !

Wouldst thou have honour and obedience,

Who art a torturer ? Father, never dream,

Though thou mayst overbear this company,

But ill must come of ill. — Frown not on me !

Haste, hide thyself, lest with avenging looks

My brothers' ghosts should hunt thee from thy seat !

Cover thy face from every living eye,

And start if thou but hear a human step :

Seek out some dark and silent corner, there

Bow thy white head before offended God,

And we will kneel around, and fervently

Pray that he pity both ourselves and thee.

Cen. My friends, I do lament this insane girl
Has spoiled the mirth of our festivity.

Good night, farewell ; I will not make you
longer

Spectators of our dull domestic quarrels.
Another time. —

(Exeunt all but Cenci and Beatrice.)

My brain is swimming round;
Give me a bowl of wine! *(To Beatrice.)* Thou
painted viper! 165

Beast that thou art! Fair and yet terrible!
I know a charm shall make thee meek and tame,
Now get thee from my sight! *(Exit Beatrice.)*

Here, Andrea,
Fill up this goblet with Greek wine. I said
I would not drink this evening; but I must; 170
For, strange to say, I feel my spirits fail
With thinking what I have decreed to do.

(Drinking the wine.)

Be thou the resolution of quick youth
Within my veins, and manhood's purpose stern,
And age's firm, cold, subtle villainy; 175
As if thou wert indeed my children's blood
Which I did thirst to drink. The charm works
well;

It must be done; it shall be done, I swear!
(Exit.)

End of the First Act.

ACT II.

SCENE I. *An Apartment in the Cenci Palace. Enter
Lucretia and Bernardo.*

Lucretia. Weep not, my gentle boy ; he struck
but me,
Who have borne deeper wrongs. In truth, if he
Had killed me, he had done a kinder deed.
O, God Almighty, do thou look upon us,
We have no other friend but only thee ! 5
Yet weep not ; though I love you as my own,
I am not your true mother.

Bernardo. Oh, more, more
Than ever mother was to any child,
That have you been to me ! Had he not been
My father, do you think that I should weep ? 10
Lucr. Alas, poor boy, what else couldst thou
have done ?

Enter Beatrice.

Beatrice (in a hurried voice). Did he pass this
way ? Have you seen him, brother ?
Ah ! No, that is his step upon the stairs ;
'Tis nearer now ; his hand is on the door ;
Mother, if I to thee have ever been 15
A duteous child, now save me ! Thou, great God,
Whose image upon earth a father is,

Dost thou indeed abandon me? He comes;
The door is opening now; I see his face;
He frowns on others, but he smiles on me, 20
Even as he did after the feast last night.

Enter a Servant.

Almighty God, how merciful thou art!
'Tis but Orsino's servant. — Well, what news? 25

Servant. My master bids me say, the Holy
Father

Has sent back your petition thus unopened. 25
(Giving a paper.)

And he demands at what hour 'twere secure
To visit you again?

Lucr. At the Ave Mary.

(Exit Servant.)

So, daughter, our last hope has failed; Ah me,
How pale you look; you tremble, and you stand
Wrapped in some fixed and fearful meditation, 30
As if one thought were over strong for you:
Your eyes have a chill glare; O, dearest child!
Are you gone mad? If not, pray speak to me.

Beatr. You see I am not mad; I speak to
you.

Lucr. You talked of something that your
father did 35

After that dreadful feast? Could it be worse
Than when he smiled, and cried, My sons are
dead!

And every one looked in his neighbour's face
To see if others were as white as he?
At the first word he spoke I felt the blood 40
Rush to my heart, and fell into a trance;
And when it past I sat all weak and wild;
Whilst you alone stood up, and with strong
words

Checked his unnatural pride; and I could see
The devil was rebuked that lives in him. 45
Until this hour thus you have ever stood
Between us and your father's moody wrath
Like a protecting presence: your firm mind
Has been our only refuge and defence:
What can have thus subdued it? What can now 50
Have given you that cold melancholy look,
Succeeding to your unaccustomed fear?

Beatr. What is it that you say? I was just
thinking

'Twere better not to struggle any more.
Men, like my father, have been dark and bloody, 55
Yet never — O! before worse comes of it
'Twere wise to die: it ends in that at last.

Lucr. Oh, talk not so, dear child! Tell me
at once

What did your father do or say to you?
He stayed not after that accursed feast 60
One moment in your chamber. — Speak to me.

Ber. Oh, sister, sister, prithee, speak to us!

Beatr. (speaking very slowly with a forced calmness). It was one word, mother, one little word;

One look, one smile. (*Wildly.*) Oh! He has trampled me

Under his feet, and made the blood stream down 65

My pallid cheeks. And he has given us all

Ditch-water, and the fever-stricken flesh

Of buffaloes, and bade us eat or starve,

And we have eaten. He has made me look

On my beloved Bernardo, when the rust 70

Of heavy chains has gangrened his sweet limbs,

And I have never yet despaired — but now!

What would I say? (*recovering herself.*) Ah! No,
'tis nothing new.

The sufferings we all share have made me wild:

He only struck and cursed me as he passed; 75

He said, he looked, he did; — nothing at all

Beyond his wont, yet it disordered me.

Alas! I am forgetful of my duty,

I should preserve my senses for your sake.

Lucr. Nay, Beatrice; have courage, my sweet girl. 80

If any one despairs it should be I,

Who loved him once, and now must live with
him

Till God in pity call for him or me.

For you may, like your sister, find some husband,

And smile, years hence, with children round your
knees ; 85
Whilst I, then dead, and all this hideous coil,
Shall be remembered only as a dream.

Beatr. Talk not to me, dear lady, of a husband.

Did you not nurse me when my mother died ?
Did you not shield me and that dearest boy ? 90
And had we any other friend but you
In infancy, with gentle words and looks,
To win our father not to murder us ?
And shall I now desert you ? May the ghost
Of my dead mother plead against my soul, 95
If I abandon her who filled the place
She left, with more, even, than a mother's love !

Ber. And I am of my sister's mind. Indeed
I would not leave you in this wretchedness,
Even though the Pope should make me free to
live 100

In some blithe place, like others of my age,
With sports, and delicate food, and the fresh air.
Oh, never think that I will leave you, mother !

Lucr. My dear, dear children !

Enter Cenci, suddenly.

Cenci. What ! Beatrice here !
Come hither ! (*She shrinks back and covers her face.*) Nay, hide not your face, 'tis fair ; 105
Look up ! Why, yesternight you dared to look

With disobedient insolence upon me,
Bending a stern and an inquiring brow
On what I meant; whilst I then sought to hide
That which I came to tell you — but in vain.' 110

Beatr. (wildly, staggering towards the door). Oh,
that the earth would gape! Hide me, oh
God!

Cen. Then it was I whose inarticulate words
Fell from my lips, and who with tottering steps
Fled from your presence, as you now from mine.
Stay, I command you: from this day and hour 115
Never again, I think, with fearless eye,
And brow superior, and unaltered cheek,
And that lip made for tenderness or scorn,
Shalt thou strike dumb the meanest of mankind;
Me least of all. Now get thee to thy chamber! 120
Thou too, loathed image of thy cursed mother,
(*To Bernardo.*) Thy milky, meek face makes me
sick with hate!

(*Exeunt Beatr[ice] and Ber[nardo].*)

(*Aside.*) So much has past between us as must
make

Me bold, her fearful. 'Tis an awful thing
To touch such mischief as I now conceive: 125
So men sit shivering on the dewy bank
And try the chill stream with their feet; once
in —

How the delighted spirit pants for joy!

Lucr. (*advancing timidly towards him*). Oh, husband! Pray forgive poor Beatrice, She meant not any ill.

Cen. Nor you, perhaps? 130
Nor that young imp, whom you have taught by rote

Parricide with his alphabet? nor Giacomo?
Nor those two most unnatural sons, who stirred
Enmity up against me with the Pope?
Whom in one night merciful God cut off: 135
Innocent lambs! They thought not any ill.
You were not here conspiring? You said nothing
Of how I might be dungeoned as a madman;
Or be condemned to death for some offence,
And you would be the witnesses? — This failing, 140
How just it were to hire assassins, or
Put sudden poison in my evening drink?
Or smother me when overcome by wine?
Seeing we had no other judge but God,
And he had sentenced me, and there were none 145
But you to be the executioners
Of his decree enregistered in heaven?
Oh, no! You said not this?

Lucr. So help me God,
I never thought the things you charge me with!

Cen. If you dare speak that wicked lie again, 150
I'll kill you. What! it was not by your counsel
That Beatrice disturbed the feast last night?

You did not hope to stir some enemies
Against me, and escape, and laugh to scorn
What every nerve of you now trembles at? 155
You judged that men were bolder than they are :
Few dare to stand between their grave and me.

Lucr. Look not so dreadfully ! By my salvation

I knew not aught that Beatrice designed ;
Nor do I think she designed anything 160
Until she heard you talk of her dead brothers.

Cen. Blaspheming liar ! you are damned for this !

But I will take you where you may persuade
The stones you tread on to deliver you :
For men shall there be none but those who dare 165
All things ; not question that which I command.
On Wednesday next I shall set out : you know
That savage rock, the Castle of Petrella :
'Tis safely walled, and moated round about :
Its dungeons under-ground, and its thick towers, 170
Never told tales ; though they have heard and seen
What might make dumb things speak. Why do
you linger ?

Make speediest preparation for the journey !

(*Exit Lucretia.*)

The all-beholding sun yet shines ; I hear
A busy stir of men about the streets ; 175
I see the bright sky through the window panes :

It is a garish, broad and peering day ;
Loud, light, suspicious, full of eyes and ears ;
And every little corner, nook, and hole,
Is penetrated with the insolent light. 180

Come, darkness ! Yet, what is the day to me ?
And wherefore should I wish for night, who do
A deed which shall confound both night and day ?
Tis she shall grope through a bewildering mist
Of horror : if there be a sun in heaven, 185

She shall not dare to look upon its beams,
Nor feel its warmth. Let her then wish for
night ;

The act I think shall soon extinguish all
For me : I bear a darker deadlier gloom
Than the earth's shade, or interlunar air, 190
Or constellations quenched in murkiest cloud,
In which I walk secure and unbeheld
Towards my purpose. — Would that it were
done ! (Exit.)

SCENE II. *A Chamber in the Vatican. Enter Camillo
and Giacomo, in conversation.*

Camillo. There is an obsolete and doubtful law
By which you might obtain a bare provision
Of food and clothing —

Giacomo. Nothing more ? Alas !
Bare must be the provision which strict law
Awards, and aged, sullen avarice pays. 5

Why did my father not apprentice me
To some mechanic trade? I should have then
Been trained in no high-born necessities
Which I could meet not by my daily toil.
The eldest son of a rich nobleman 10
Is heir to all his incapacities;
He has wide wants, and narrow powers. If you,
Cardinal Camillo, were reduced at once
From thrice-driven beds of down, and delicate
food,
An hundred servants, and six palaces, 15
To that which nature doth indeed require?—

Cam. Nay, there is reason in your plea;
'twere hard.

Giac. 'Tis hard for a firm man to bear: but I
Have a dear wife, a lady of high birth,
Whose dowry in ill hour I lent my father, 20
Without a bond or witness to the deed:
And children, who inherit her fine senses,
The fairest creatures in this breathing world;
And she and they reproach me not. Cardinal,
Do you not think the Pope would interpose, 25
And stretch authority beyond the law?

Cam. Though your peculiar case is hard, I
know

The Pope will not divert the course of law.
After that impious feast the other night
I spoke with him, and urged him then to check 30

Your father's cruel hand ; he frowned and said,
" Children are disobedient, and they sting
" Their fathers' hearts to madness and despair,
" Requiting years of care with contumely.

" I pity the Count Cenci from my heart ; 35
" His outraged love perhaps awakened hate,
" And thus he is exasperated to ill.
" In the great war between the old and young,
" I, who have white hairs and a tottering body,
" Will keep at least blameless neutrality." 40

Enter Orsino.

You, my good lord Orsino, heard those words.

Orsino. What words ?

Giac. Alas, repeat them not again !

There then is no redress for me ; at least
None but that which I may achieve myself,
Since I am driven to the brink. But, say, 45
My innocent sister and my only brother
Are dying underneath my father's eye.
The memorable [torturers] of this land,
Galeaz Visconti, Borgia, Ezzelin,
Never inflicted on their meanest slave 50
What these endure ; shall they have no protection ?

Cam. Why, if they would petition to the Pope,
I see not how he could refuse it — yet
He holds it of most dangerous example

In aught to weaken the paternal power, 55
Being, as 'twere, the shadow of his own.
I pray you now excuse me. I have business
That will not bear delay. (*Exit Camillo.*)

Giac. But you, Orsino,
Have the petition : wherefore not present it ?

Ors. I have presented it, and backed it with 60
My earnest prayers, and urgent interest ;
It was returned unanswered. I doubt not
But that the strange and execrable deeds
Alleged in it (in truth they might well baffle
Any belief) have turned the Pope's displeasure 65
Upon the accusers from the criminal :
So I should guess from what Camillo said.

Giac. My friend, that palace-walking devil,
Gold,
Has whispered silence to his Holiness :
And we are left, as scorpions ringed with fire, 70
What should we do but strike ourselves to death ?
For he who is our murderous persecutor
Is shielded by a father's holy name,
Or I would — (*Stops abruptly.*)

Ors. What? Fear not to speak your
thought.
Words are but holy as the deeds they cover : 75
A priest who has forsworn the God he serves ;
A judge who makes truth weep at his decree ;

77 *makes truth.* 1819, makes the truth.

A friend who should weave counsel, as I now,
But as the mantle of some selfish guile;
A father who is all a tyrant seems, 80
Were the profaner for his sacred name.

Giac. Ask me not what I think; the unwilling brain

Feigns often what it would not; and we trust
Imagination with such fantasies
As the tongue dares not fashion into words; 85
Which have no words, their horror makes them
dim

To the mind's eye. My heart denies itself
To think what you demand.

Ors. But a friend's bosom

Is as the inmost cave of our own mind,
Where we sit shut from the wide gaze of day, 90
And from the all-communicating air.
You look what I suspected:

Giac. Spare me now!

I am as one lost in a midnight wood,
Who dares not ask some harmless passenger
The path across the wilderness, lest he, 95
As my thoughts are, should be — a murderer.
I know you are my friend, and all I dare
Speak to my soul, that will I trust with thee.
But now my heart is heavy, and would take
Lone counsel from a night of sleepless care. 100
Pardon me that I say farewell — farewell!

I would that to my own suspected self
I could address a word so full of peace.

Ors. Farewell ! — Be your thoughts better or
more bold. (Exit Giacomo.)

I had disposed the Cardinal Camillo 105

To feed his hope with cold encouragement :

It fortunately serves my close designs

That 'tis a trick of this same family

To analyze their own and other minds.

Such self-anatomy shall teach the will 110

Dangerous secrets : for it tempts our powers,

Knowing what must be thought, and may be
done,

Into the depth of darkest purposes :

So Cenci fell into the pit ; even I,

Since Beatrice unveiled me to myself, 115

And made me shrink from what I cannot shun,

Shew a poor figure to my own esteem,

To which I grow half reconciled. I'll do

As little mischief as I can ; that thought

Shall fee the accuser conscience.

(After a pause.) Now what harm 120

If Cenci should be murdered ? — Yet, if mur-
dered,

Wherefore by me ? And what if I could take

The profit, yet omit the sin and peril

In such an action ? Of all earthly things

I fear a man whose blows outspeed his words ; 125

And such is Cenci : and while Cenci lives
His daughter's dowry were a secret grave,
If a priest wins her.— Oh, fair Beatrice !
Would that I loved thee not, or loving thee
Could but despise danger and gold, and all 130
That frowns between my wish and its effect,
Or smiles beyond it ! There is no escape :
Her bright form kneels beside me at the altar,
And follows me to the resort of men,
And fills my slumber with tumultuous dreams, 135
So, when I wake, my blood seems liquid fire ;
And if I strike my damp and dizzy head,
My hot palm scorches it : her very name,
But spoken by a stranger, makes my heart
Sicken and pant ; and thus unprofitably 140
I clasp the phantom of unfelt delights
Till weak imagination half possesses
The self-created shadow. Yet much longer
Will I not nurse this life of feverous hours :
From the unravelled hopes of Giacomo 145
I must work out my own dear purposes.
I see, as from a tower, the end of all :
Her father dead ; her brother bound to me
By a dark secret, surer than the grave ;
Her mother scared and unexpostulating 150
From the dread manner of her wish achieved :
And she ! — Once more take courage, my faint
heart ;

What dares a friendless maiden matched with
thee ?

I have such foresight as assures success :
Some unbeheld divinity doth ever, 155
When dread events are near, stir up men's minds
To black suggestions ; and he prospers best,
Not who becomes the instrument of ill,
But who can flatter the dark spirit, that makes
Its empire and its prey of other hearts, 160
Till it become his slave — as I will do. (*Exit.*)

End of the Second Act.

ACT III.

SCENE I. *An Apartment in the Cenci Palace. Lucretia, to her enter Beatrice.*

Beatrice. (*She enters staggering, and speaks wildly.*) Reach me that handkerchief! —
My brain is hurt;
My eyes are full of blood; just wipe them for me —

I see but indistinctly: —

Lucretia. My sweet child,
You have no wound; 'tis only a cold dew
That starts from your dear brow — Alas! Alas! 5
What has befallen?

Beatr. How comes this hair undone?
Its wandering strings must be what blind me so,
And yet I tied it fast. — O, horrible!
The pavement sinks under my feet! The walls
Spin round! I see a woman weeping there, 10
And standing calm and motionless, whilst I
Slide giddily as the world reels — My God!
The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!
The sunshine on the floor is black! The air
Is changed to vapours such as the dead breathe 15
In charnel-pits! Pah! I am choked! There
creeps

A clinging, black, contaminating mist
About me — 'tis substantial, heavy, thick,
I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
My fingers and my limbs to one another, 20
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!
My God! I never knew what the mad felt
Before; for I am mad beyond all doubt! 25
(*More wildly.*) No, I am dead! These putrefying
limbs

Shut round and sepulchre the panting soul,
Which would burst forth into the wandering air!
(*A pause.*) What hideous thought was that I had
even now?

'Tis gone; and yet its burthen remains here 30
O'er these dull eyes — upon this weary heart!
O, world! O, life! O, day! O, misery!

Lucr. What ails thee, my poor child? She
answers not:

Her spirit apprehends the sense of pain,
But not its cause; suffering has dried away 35
The source from which it sprung.

Beatr. (frantically). Like parricide —
Misery has killed its father: yet its father
Never like mine — O, God! What thing am I?

Lucr. My dearest child, what has your father
done?

Beatr. (doubtfully). Who art thou, questioner?

I have no father.

40

(Aside.) She is the madhouse nurse who tends on me,

It is a piteous office. *(To Lucretia, in a slow, subdued voice.)* Do you know

I thought I was that wretched Beatrice

Men speak of, whom her father sometimes hales
From hall to hall by the entangled hair ;

45

At others, pens up naked in damp cells

Where scaly reptiles crawl, and starves her there,
Till she will eat strange flesh. This woful story

So did I overact in my sick dreams,

That I imagined — no, it cannot be !

50

Horrible things have been in this wild world,

Prodigious mixtures, and confusions strange

Of good and ill ; and worse have been conceived

Than ever there was found a heart to do.

But never fancy imaged such a deed

55

As — *(Pauses, suddenly recollecting herself.)*

Who art thou ? Swear to me, ere I die

With fearful expectation, that indeed

Thou art not what thou seemest — Mother !

Lucr.

Oh !

My sweet child, know you —

Beatr.

Yet speak it not :

For then if this be truth, that other too

60

Must be a truth, a firm enduring truth,

Linked with each lasting circumstance of life,
Never to change, never to pass away.

Why so it is. This is the Cenci Palace;
Thou art Lucretia; I am Beatrice.

65

I have talked some wild words, but will no more.
Mother, come near me: from this point of time,
I am — *(Her voice dies away faintly.)*

Lucr. Alas! What has befallen thee,
child?

What has thy father done?

Beatr. What have I done?

Am I not innocent? Is it my crime

70

That one with white hair, and imperious brow,
Who tortured me from my forgotten years,
As parents only dare, should call himself
My father, yet should be! — Oh, what am I?
What name, what place, what memory shall be
mine?

75

What retrospects, outliving even despair?

Lucr. He is a violent tyrant, surely, child;
We know that death alone can make us free;
His death or ours. But what can he have done
Of deadlier outrage or worse injury?

80

Thou art unlike thyself; thine eyes shoot forth
A wandering and strange spirit. Speak to me,
Unlock those pallid hands whose fingers twine
With one another.

Beatr. 'Tis the restless life

Tortured within them. If I try to speak, 85
I shall go mad. Ay, something must be done;
What, yet I know not — something which shall
make

The thing that I have suffered but a shadow
In the dread lightning which avenges it;
Brief, rapid, irreversible, destroying 90
The consequence of what it cannot cure.
Some such thing is to be endured or done:
When I know what, I shall be still and calm,
And never any thing will move me more.
But now! — Oh blood, which art my father's
blood, 95

Circling through these contaminated veins,
If thou, poured forth on the polluted earth,
Could wash away the crime, and punishment
By which I suffer — no, that cannot be!
Many might doubt there were a God above 100
Who sees and permits evil, and so die:
That faith no agony shall obscure in me.

Lucr. It must indeed have been some bitter
wrong;

Yet what, I dare not guess. Oh, my lost child,
Hide not in proud impenetrable grief 105
Thy sufferings from my fear.

Beatr. I hide them not.

What are the words which you would have me
speak?

I, who can feign no image in my mind
Of that which has transformed me : I, whose
thought

Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up 110
In its own formless horror: of all words,
That minister to mortal intercourse,
Which wouldst thou hear? For there is none to
tell

My misery ; if another ever knew
Aught like to it, she died as I will die, 115
And left it, as I must, without a name.
Death! Death! Our law and our religion call thee
A punishment and a reward. — Oh, which
Have I deserved?

Lucr. The peace of innocence ;
Till in your season you be called to heaven. 120
Whate'er you may have suffered, you have done
No evil. Death must be the punishment
Of crime, or the reward of trampling down
The thorns which God has strewed upon the path
Which leads to immortality.

Beatr. Ay, death — 125
The punishment of crime. I pray thee, God,
Let me not be bewildered while I judge.
If I must live day after day, and keep
These limbs, the unworthy temple of thy spirit,
As a foul den from which what thou abhorrest 130
May mock thee, unavenged — it shall not be!

Self-murder? no, that might be no escape,
For thy decree yawns like a Hell between
Our will and it. O! in this mortal world
There is no vindication and no law 135
Which can adjudge and execute the doom
Of that through which I suffer.

Enter Orsino.

(*She approaches him solemnly.*) Welcome, friend!
I have to tell you that, since last we met,
I have endured a wrong so great and strange,
That neither life nor death can give me rest. 140
Ask me not what it is, for there are deeds
Which have no form, sufferings which have no
tongue.

Orsino. And what is he who has thus injured
you?

Beatr. The man they call my father: a dread
name.

Ors. It cannot be —

Beatr. What it can be, or not, 145
Forbear to think. It is, and it has been;
Advise me how it shall not be again.
I thought to die, but a religious awe
Restrains me, and the dread lest death itself
Might be no refuge from the consciousness 150
Of what is yet unexpiated. Oh, speak!

Ors. Accuse him of the deed, and let the law
Avenge thee.

Beatr. Oh, ice-hearted counsellor !
If I could find a word that might make known
The crime of my destroyer ; and that done, 155
My tongue should, like a knife, tear out the secret
Which cankers my heart's core ; ay, lay all bare,
So that my unpolluted fame should be
With vilest gossips a stale mouthed story ;
A mock, a bye-word, an astonishment : — 160
If this were done, which never shall be done,
Think of the offender's gold, his dreaded hate,
And the strange horror of the accuser's tale,
Baffling belief, and overpowering speech ;
Scarce whispered, unimaginable, wrapt 165
In hideous hints — Oh, most assured redress !

Ors. You will endure it then ?

Beatr. Endure ! Orsino,
It seems your counsel is small profit.
(*Turns from him, and speaks half to herself.*) Ay,
All must be suddenly resolved and done.
What is this undistinguishable mist 170
Of thoughts, which rise, like shadow after shadow,
Darkening each other ?

Ors. Should the offender live ?
Triumph in his misdeed ? and make, by use,
His crime, whate'er it is, dreadful no doubt,
Thine element ; until thou mayest become 175
Utterly lost ; subdued even to the hue
Of that which thou permittest ?

Beatr. (to herself). Mighty death!
Thou double-visaged shadow! Only judge!
Rightfullest arbiter!

(She retires absorbed in thought.)

Lucr. If the lightning
Of God has e'er descended to avenge — 180

Ors. Blaspheme not! His high Providence
commits

Its glory on this earth, and their own wrongs
Into the hands of men; if they neglect
To punish crime —

Lucr. But if one, like this wretch,
Should mock, with gold, opinion, law, and power? 185
If there be no appeal to that which makes
The guiltiest tremble? If, because our wrongs,
For that they are unnatural, strange, and mon-
strous,

Exceed all measure of belief? Oh, God!
If, for the very reasons which should make 190
Redress most swift and sure, our injurer tri-
umphs?

And we, the victims, bear worse punishment
Than that appointed for their torturer?

Ors. Think not
But that there is redress where there is wrong,
So we be bold enough to seize it.

Lucr. How? 195
If there were any way to make all sure,

I know not — but I think it might be good
To —

Ors. Why, his late outrage to Beatrice;
For it is such, as I but faintly guess,
As makes remorse dishonour, and leaves her 200
Only one duty, how she may avenge:
You, but one refuge from ills ill endured;
Me, but one counsel —

Lucr. For we cannot hope
That aid, or retribution, or resource,
Will arise thence, where every other one 205
Might find them with less need.

(*Beatrice advances.*)

Ors. Then —

Beatr. Peace, Orsino!

And, honoured Lady, while I speak, I pray
That you put off, as garments overworn,
Forbearance and respect, remorse and fear,
And all the fit restraints of daily life, 210
Which have been borne from childhood, but
which now

Would be a mockery to my holier plea.
As I have said, I have endured a wrong,
Which, though it be expressionless, is such
As asks atonement, both for what is past, 215
And lest I be reserved, day after day,
To load with crimes an overburthened soul,
And be — what ye can dream not. I have prayed

To God, and I have talked with my own heart,
And have unravelled my entangled will, 220
And have at length determined what is right.
Art thou my friend, Orsino? False or true?
Pledge thy salvation ere I speak.

Ors. I swear
To dedicate my cunning, and my strength,
My silence, and whatever else is mine, 225
To thy commands.

Lucr. You think we should devise
His death?

Beatr. And execute what is devised,
And suddenly. We must be brief and bold.

Ors. And yet most cautious.

Lucr. For the jealous laws
Would punish us with death and infamy 230
For that which it became themselves to do.

Beatr. Be cautious as ye may, but prompt.

Orsino,
What are the means?

Ors. I know two dull, fierce outlaws,
Who think man's spirit as a worm's, and they
Would trample out, for any slight caprice, 235
The meanest or the noblest life. This mood
Is marketable here in Rome. They sell
What we now want.

Lucr. To-morrow, before dawn,
Cenci will take us to that lonely rock,

Petrella, in the Apulian Apeninnes.

240

If he arrive there —

Beatr. He must not arrive.

Ors. Will it be dark before you reach the tower?

Lucr. The sun will scarce be set.

Beatr. But I remember

Two miles on this side of the fort, the road
Crosses a deep ravine; 'tis rough and narrow, 245
And winds with short turns down the precipice;
And in its depth there is a mighty rock,
Which has, from unimaginable years,
Sustained itself with terror and with toil
Over a gulph, and with the agony 250
With which it clings seems slowly coming down;
Even as a wretched soul hour after hour,
Clings to the mass of life; yet clinging, leans;
And leaning, makes more dark the dread abyss
In which it fears to fall: beneath this crag, 255
Huge as despair, as if in weariness,
The melancholy mountain yawns; below,
You hear but see not an impetuous torrent
Raging among the caverns, and a bridge
Crosses the chasm; and high above there grow, 260
With intersecting trunks, from crag to crag,
Cedars, and yews, and pines; whose tangled hair
Is matted in one solid roof of shade
By the dark ivy's twine. At noon-day here

'Tis twilight, and at sunset blackest night. 265

Ors. Before you reach that bridge make
some excuse

For spurring on your mules, or loitering
Until —

Beatr. What sound is that ?

Lucr. Hark! No, it cannot be a servant's
step ;

It must be Cenci, unexpectedly 270

Returned — Make some excuse for being here.

Beatr. (to Orsino as she goes out). That step we
hear approach must never pass

The bridge of which we spoke.

(*Exeunt Lucretia and Beatrice.*)

Ors. What shall I do ?

Cenci must find me here, and I must bear

The imperious inquisition of his looks 275

As to what brought me hither : let me mask

Mine own in some inane and vacant smile.

Enter Giacomo, in a hurried manner.

How! Have you ventured hither? Know you
then

That Cenci is from home?

Giacomo. I sought him here ;

And now must wait till he returns.

Ors. Great God ! 280

Weigh you the danger of this rashness ?

278 *hither.* 1819, *thither.*

Giac.

Ay!

Does my destroyer know his danger? We
Are now no more, as once, parent and child,
But man to man; the oppressor to the oppressed;
The slanderer to the slandered; foe to foe. 285
He has cast Nature off, which was his shield,
And Nature casts him off, who is her shame;
And I spurn both. Is it a father's throat
Which I will shake, and say, I ask not gold;
I ask not happy years; nor memories 290
Of tranquil childhood; nor home-sheltered love;
Though all these hast thou torn from me, and
more;

But only my fair fame; only one hoard
Of peace, which I thought hidden from thy hate,
Under the penury heaped on me by thee; 295
Or I will — God can understand and pardon,
Why should I speak with man?

Ors.

Be calm, dear friend.

Giac. Well, I will calmly tell you what he
did.

This old Francesco Cenci, as you know,
Borrowed the dowry of my wife from me, 300
And then denied the loan; and left me so
In poverty, the which I sought to mend
By holding a poor office in the state.
It had been promised to me, and already
I bought new clothing for my ragged babes, 305

And my wife smiled ; and my heart knew repose ;
When Cenci's intercession, as I found,
Conferred this office on a wretch, whom thus
He paid for vilest service. I returned
With this ill news, and we sate sad together 310
Solacing our despondency with tears
Of such affection and unbroken faith
As temper life's worst bitterness ; when he,
As he is wont, came to upbraid and curse,
Mocking our poverty, and telling us 315
Such was God's scourge for disobedient sons.
And then, that I might strike him dumb with
shame,
I spoke of my wife's dowry ; but he coined
A brief yet specious tale, how I had wasted
The sum in secret riot ; and he saw 320
My wife was touched, and he went smiling forth.
And when I knew the impression he had made,
And felt my wife insult with silent scorn
My ardent truth, and look averse and cold,
I went forth too : but soon returned again ; 325
Yet not so soon but that my wife had taught
My children her harsh thoughts, and they all
cried,
" Give us clothes, father ! Give us better food !
What you in one night squander were enough
For months ! " I looked, and saw that home was
hell ; 330

And to that hell will I return no more
Until mine enemy has rendered up
Atonement, or, as he gave life to me
I will, reversing nature's law —

Ors.

Trust me,

The compensation which thou seekest here 335
Will be denied.

Giac.

Then — Are you not my friend?
Did you not hint at the alternative,
Upon the brink of which you see I stand,
The other day when we conversed together?
My wrongs were then less. That word parricide, 340
Although I am resolved, haunts me like fear.

Ors.

It must be fear itself, for the bare word
Is hollow mockery. Mark, how wisest God
Draws to one point the threads of a just doom,
So sanctifying it: what you devise 345
Is, as it were, accomplished.

Giac.

Is he dead?

Ors. His grave is ready. Know that since
we met

Cenci has done an outrage to his daughter.

Giac. What outrage?

Ors.

That she speaks not, but you may
Conceive such half conjectures as I do, 350
From her fixed paleness, and the lofty grief
Of her stern brow, bent on the idle air,
And her severe unmodulated voice,

Drowning both tenderness and dread; and last
From this; that whilst her step-mother and I, 355
Bewildered in our horror, talked together
With obscure hints; both self-misunderstood,
And darkly guessing, stumbling, in our talk,
Over the truth, and yet to its revenge,
She interrupted us, and with a look 360
Which told before she spoke it, he must die:—

Giac. It is enough. My doubts are well appeased;

There is a higher reason for the act
Than mine; there is a holier judge than me,
A more unblamed avenger. Beatrice, 365
Who in the gentleness of thy sweet youth
Hast never trodden on a worm, or bruised
A living flower, but thou hast pitied it
With needless tears! Fair sister, thou in whom
Men wondered how such loveliness and wisdom 370
Did not destroy each other! Is there made
Ravage of thee? O, heart, I ask no more
Justification! Shall I wait, Orsino,
Till he return, and stab him at the door?

Ors. Not so; some accident might interpose 375
To rescue him from what is now most sure;
And you are unprovided where to fly,
How to excuse or to conceal. Nay, listen:
All is contrived; success is so assured
That —

Enter Beatrice.

Beatrice. 'Tis my brother's voice! You
know me not? 380

Giac. My sister, my lost sister!

Beatr. Lost indeed!

I see Orsino has talked with you, and
That you conjecture things too horrible
To speak, yet far less than the truth. Now, stay
not,

He might return: yet kiss me; I shall know 385
That then thou hast consented to his death.

Farewell, farewell! Let piety to God,
Brotherly love, justice, and clemency,
And all things that make tender hardest hearts,
Make thine hard, brother. Answer not: farewell. 390
(*Exeunt severally.*)

SCENE II. *A mean Apartment in Giacomo's House.*

Giacomo alone.

Giacomo. 'Tis midnight, and Orsino comes not
yet. (*Thunder, and the sound of a storm.*)

What! can the everlasting elements
Feel with a worm like man? If so, the shaft
Of mercy-winged lightning would not fall
On stones and trees. My wife and children sleep: 5
They are now living in unmeaning dreams:
But I must wake, still doubting if that deed
Be just, which was most necessary. O,

Thou un replenished lamp! whose narrow fire
Is shaken by the wind, and on whose edge 10
Devouring darkness hovers! Thou small flame,
Which, as a dying pulse rises and falls,
Still flickerest up and down, how very soon,
Did I not feed thee, wouldst thou fail and be
As thou hadst never been! So wastes and sinks 15
Even now, perhaps, the life that kindled mine:
But that no power can fill with vital oil,
That broken lamp of flesh. Ha! 'tis the blood
Which fed these veins, that ebbs till all is cold:
It is the form that moulded mine, that sinks 20
Into the white and yellow spasms of death:
It is the soul by which mine was arrayed
In God's immortal likeness, which now stands
Naked before Heaven's judgment seat! (*A bell
strikes.*) One! Two!

The hours crawl on; and, when my hairs are
white, 25
My son will then perhaps be waiting thus,
Tortured between just hate and vain remorse;
Chiding the tardy messenger of news
Like those which I expect. I almost wish
He be not dead, although my wrongs are great; 30
Yet — 'tis Orsino's step —

Enter Orsino.

Speak!

Orsino.

I am come

To say he has escaped.

Giac.

Escaped !

Ors.

And safe

Within Petrella. He past by the spot

Appointed for the deed an hour too soon.

Giac. Are we the fools of such contingencies ?

35

And do we waste in blind misgivings thus

The hours when we should act ? Then wind and
thunder,

Which seemed to howl his knell, is the loud
laughter

With which Heaven mocks our weakness ! I
henceforth

Will ne'er repent of aught, designed or done, 40
But my repentance.

Ors.

See, the lamp is out.

Giac. If no remorse is ours when the dim air
Has [drunk] this innocent flame, why should
we quail

When Cenci's life, that light by which ill spirits
See the worst deeds they prompt, shall sink for-
ever ?

45

No, I am hardened.

Ors.

Why, what need of this ?

Who feared the pale intrusion of remorse

In a just deed ? Although our first plan failed,

43 *drunk.* Suggested by Cunningham, ed. 1839 ; 1819, 1821,
drank.

Doubt not but he will soon be laid to rest.
But light the lamp; let us not talk i' the dark. 50

Giac. (*lighting the lamp*). And yet, once
quenched, I cannot thus relume
My father's life: do you not think his ghost
Might plead that argument with God?

Ors. Once gone,
You cannot now recal[l] your sister's peace;
Your own extinguished years of youth and hope; 55
Nor your wife's bitter words; nor all the taunts
Which, from the prosperous, weak misfortune
takes;

Nor your dead mother; nor —

Giac. O, speak no more!
I am resolved, although this very hand
Must quench the life that animated it. 60

Ors. There is no need of that. Listen; you
know,
Olimpio, the castellan of Petrella
In old Colonna's time; him whom your father
Degraded from his post? And Marzio,
That desperate wretch, whom he deprived last
year 65
Of a reward of blood, well earned and due?

Giac. I knew Olimpio; and they say he
hated

Old Cenci so, that in his silent rage

His lips grew white only to see him pass.
Of Marzio I know nothing.

Ors. Marzio's hate 70
Matches Olimpio's. I have sent these men,
But in your name, and as at your request,
To talk with Beatrice and Lucretia.

Giac. Only to talk?

Ors. The moments which even now
Pass onward to to morrow's midnight hour 75
May memorise their flight with death: ere then
They must have talked, and may perhaps have
done,
And made an end—

Giac. Listen! What sound is that?

Ors. The house-dog moans, and the beams
crack: nought else.

Giac. It is my wife complaining in her sleep: 80
I doubt not she is saying bitter things
Of me; and all my children round her dreaming
That I deny them sustenance.

Ors. Whilst he
Who truly took it from them, and who fills
Their hungry rest with bitterness, now sleeps 85
Lapped in bad pleasures, and triumphantly
Mocks thee in visions of successful hate
Too like the truth of day.

Giac. If e'er he wakes
Again, I will not trust to hireling hands —

Ors. Why, that were well. I must be gone;
good night !

90

When next we meet may all be done —

Giac.

And all

Forgotten — Oh, that I had never been ! (*Exeunt.*)

90-92 *good night* . . . *Forgotten*. The text adopts the punctuation of Shelley's *errata*. 1821 gives a colon after *good night*, an exclamation after *done*, a colon after *Forgotten*. 1819 gives the speech to *Giacomo*, as follows: *May all be done, and*.

End of the Third Act.

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *An Apartment in the Castle of Petrella.*

Enter Cenci.

Cenci. She comes not; yet I left her even now
Vanquished and faint. She knows the penalty
Of her delay: yet what if threats are vain?
Am I not now within Petrella's moat?
Or fear I still the eyes and ears of Rome?
Might I not drag her by the golden hair?
Stamp on her? keep her sleepless till her brain
Be overworn? tame her with chains and famine?
Less would suffice. Yet so to leave undone
What I most seek! No, 'tis her stubborn will, 10
Which, by its own consent, shall stoop as low
As that which drags it down.

Enter Lucretia.

Thou loathed wretch!
Hide thee from my abhorrence; fly, begone!
Yet stay! Bid Beatrice come hither.

Lucretia.

Oh,
Husband! I pray, for thine own wretched sake, 15
Heed what thou dost. A man who walks like
thee
Through crimes, and through the danger of his
crimes,

Each hour may stumble o'er a sudden grave.
 And thou art old; thy hairs are hoary grey;
 As thou wouldst save thyself from death and hell, 20
 Pity thy daughter; give her to some friend
 In marriage: so that she may tempt thee not
 To hatred, or worse thoughts, if worse there be.

Cen. What! like her sister who has found a
 home

To mock my hate from with prosperity? 25
 Strange ruin shall destroy both her and thee
 And all that yet remain. My death may be
 Rapid, her destiny outspeeds it. Go,
 Bid her come hither, and before my mood
 Be changed, lest I should drag her by the hair. 30

Lucr. She sent me to thee, husband. At thy
 presence

She fell, as thou dost know, into a trance;
 And in that trance she heard a voice which said,
 "Cenci must die! Let him confess himself!
 "Even now the accusing angel waits to hear 35
 "If God, to punish his enormous crimes,
 "Harden his dying heart!"

Cen. Why — such things are:
 No doubt divine revealings may be made.
 'Tis plain I have been favoured from above,
 For when I cursed my sons they died — Ay — so — 40
 As to the right or wrong that's talk — repent-
 ance —

41 *wrong that's talk.* Evidently, *wrong, that's talk.*

Repentance is an easy moment's work,
And more depends on God than me. Well —
well —

I must give up the greater point, which was
To poison and corrupt her soul.

*(A pause; Lucretia approaches anxiously, and
then shrinks back as he speaks.)*

One, two ; 45

Ay — Rocco and Cristofano my curse
Strangled : and Giacomo, I think, will find
Life a worse Hell than that beyond the grave :
Beatrice shall, if there be skill in hate,
Die in despair, blaspheming : to Bernardo, 50
He is so innocent, I will bequeath
The memory of these deeds, and make his youth
The sepulchre of hope, where evil thoughts
Shall grow like weeds on a neglected tomb.
When all is done, out in the wide Campagna 55
I will pile up my silver and my gold ;
My costly robes, paintings, and tapestries ;
My parchments and all records of my wealth ;
And make a bonfire in my joy, and leave
Of my possessions nothing but my name ; 60
Which shall be an inheritance to strip
Its wearer bare as infamy. That done,
My soul, which is a scourge, will I resign
Into the hands of him who wielded it ;
Be it for its own punishment or theirs, 65

He will not ask it of me till the lash
Be broken in its last and deepest wound;
Until its hate be all inflicted. Yet,
Lest death outspeed my purpose, let me make
Short work and sure — (Going.)

Lucr. (stops him). Oh, stay! It was a feint: 70
She had no vision, and she heard no voice.
I said it but to awe thee.

Gen. That is well.
Vile palterer with the sacred truth of God,
Be thy soul choked with that blaspheming lie!
For Beatrice, worse terrors are in store, 75
To bend her to my will.

Lucr. Oh, to what will?
What cruel sufferings, more than she has known,
Canst thou inflict?

Gen. Andrea! [*Enter Andrea.*] Go call
my daughter,
And if she comes not tell her that I come.
[*Exit Andrea.*]

What sufferings? I will drag her, step by step, 80
Through infamies unheard of among men:
She shall stand shelterless in the broad noon
Of public scorn, for acts blazoned abroad,
One among which shall be — What? Canst thou
guess?

She shall become (for what she most abhors 85

Shall have a fascination to entrap
 Her loathing will) to her own conscious self
 All she appears to others ; and when dead,
 As she shall die unshrived and unforgiven,
 A rebel to her father and her God, 90
 Her corpse shall be abandoned to the hounds ;
 Her name shall be the terror of the earth ;
 Her spirit shall approach the throne of God
 Plague-spotted with my curses. I will make
 Body and soul a monstrous lump of ruin. 95

[*Re-*] *enter Andrea.*

Andrea. The lady Beatrice —

Cen. Speak, pale slave ! What
 Said she ?

Andr. My Lord, 't was what she looked [;]
 she said :

“ Go tell my father that I see the gulph
 “ Of Hell between us two, which he may pass,
 “ I will not.” (*Exit Andrea.*)

Cen. Go thou quick, Lucretia, 100
 Tell her to come ; yet let her understand
 Her coming is consent ; and say, moreover,
 That if she come not I will curse her.

(*Exit Lucretia.*)

Ha !

With what but with a father's curse doth God
 Panic-strike armed victory, and make pale 105

97 *looked ; she said.* 1819, 1821, no punctuation.

Cities in their prosperity ? The world's Father
Must grant a parent's prayer against his child,
Be he who asks even what men call me.
Will not the deaths of her rebellious brothers
Awe her before I speak ? for I on them 110
Did imprecate quick ruin, and it came.

[Re-] enter *Lucretia*.

Well ; what ? Speak, wretch !

Lucr. She said, " I cannot come ;
" Go tell my father that I see a torrent
" Of his own blood raging between us."

Gen. (kneeling). God !
Hear me ! If this most specious mass of flesh, 115
Which thou hast made my daughter ; this my
blood,

This particle of my divided being ;
Or rather, this my bane and my disease,
Whose sight infects and poisons me ; this devil,
Which sprung from me as from a hell, was meant 120
To aught good use ; if her bright loveliness
Was kindled to illumine this dark world ;
If, nursed by thy selectest dew of love
Such virtues blossom in her as should make
The peace of life, I pray thee, for my sake, 125
As thou the common God and Father art
Of her, and me, and all ; reverse that doom !
Earth, in the name of God, let her food be
Poison, until she be encrusted round

With leprous stains ! Heaven, rain upon her head 130
The blistering drops of the Maremma's dew,
Till she be speckled like a toad ; parch up
Those love-enkindled lips, warp those fine limbs
To loathed lameness ! All beholding sun,
Strike in thine envy those life-darting eyes 135
With thine own blinding beams !

Lucr. Peace. Peace !

For thine own sake unsay those dreadful words.
When high God grants, he punishes such prayers.

Cen. (*leaping up, and throwing his right hand
towards Heaven*). He does his will, I
mine ! This in addition,

That if she have a child —

Lucr. Horrible thought ! 140

Cen. That if she ever have a child ; and thou,
Quick Nature ! I adjure thee by thy God,
That thou be fruitful in her, and encrease
And multiply, fulfilling his command,
And my deep imprecation ! May it be 145
A hideous likeness of herself ; that, as
From a distorting mirror, she may see
Her image mixed with what she most abhors,
Smiling upon her from her nursing breast.
And that the child may from its infancy 150
Grow, day by day, more wicked and deformed,

141-5 *child ; and . . . imprecation ! May. Preferably, child
— and . . . imprecation ! — May.*

Turning her mother's love to misery :
And that both she and it may live, until
It shall repay her care and pain with hate,
Or what may else be more unnatural. 155
So he may hunt her through the clamorous scoffs
Of the loud world to a dishonoured grave.
Shall I revoke this curse? Go, bid her come,
Before my words are chronicled in heaven.

(*Exit Lucretia.*)

I do not feel as if I were a man, 160
But like a fiend appointed to chastise
The offences of some unremembered world.
My blood is running up and down my veins ;
A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle :
I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe ; 165
My heart is beating with an expectation
Of horrid joy.

[*Re-*] *enter Lucretia.*

What? Speak!

Lucr. She bids thee curse ;
And if thy curses, as they cannot do,
Could kill her soul —

Cen. She would not come. 'Tis well,
I can do both : first take what I demand, 170
And then extort concession. To thy chamber !
Fly ere I spurn thee : and beware this night
That thou cross not my footsteps. It were safer
To come between the tiger and his prey.

(*Exit Lucretia.*)

It must **be** late; mine eyes grow weary dim 175
With **unaccustomed** heaviness of sleep.
Conscience! Oh, thou most insolent of lies!
They say **that** sleep, that healing dew of heaven,
Steeps **not** in balm the foldings of the brain
Which **thinks** thee an impostor. I will go, 180
First to **belie** thee with an hour of rest,
Which **will** be deep and calm, I feel: and then—
O, multitudinous Hell, the fiends will shake
Thine **arches** with the laughter of their joy!
There **shall** be lamentation heard in Heaven 185
As o'er an angel fallen; and upon Earth
All good **shall** droop and sicken, and ill things
Shall, with a spirit of unnatural life,
Stir and **be** quickened; even as I am now. (*Exit.*)

SCENE II. *Before the Castle of Petrella. Enter Beatrice and Lucretia above on the ramparts.*

Beatrice. They come not yet.

Lucretia. 'Tis scarce midnight.

Beatr. How slow

Behind **the** course of thought, even sick with
speed,

Lags **laden**-footed time!

Lucr. The minutes pass—

If he should wake before the deed is done?

Beatr. O, mother! he must never wake
again.

What thou hast said persuades me that our act
Will but dislodge a spirit of deep hell
Out of a human form.

Lucr. 'Tis true he spoke
Of death and judgment with strange confidence
For one so wicked ; as a man believing 10
In God, yet recking not of good or ill.
And yet to die without confession !

Beatr. Oh !
Believe that Heaven is merciful and just,
And will not add our dread necessity
To the amount of his offences.

Enter Olimpio and Marzio below.

Lucr. See, 15
They come.

Beatr. All mortal things must hasten thus
To their dark end. Let us go down.

(Exeunt Lucretia and Beatrice from above.)

Olimpio. How feel you to this work ?

Marzio. As one who thinks
A thousand crowns excellent market price
For an old murderer's life. Your cheeks are pale. 20

Olim. It is the white reflection of your own,
Which you call pale.

Mar. Is that their natural hue ?

Olim. Or 'tis my hate, and the deferred de-
sire
To wreak it, which extinguished their blood.

Mar. You are inclined then to this business ?

Olim. Ay, 25

If one should bribe me with a thousand crowns
To kill a serpent which had stung my child,
I could not be more willing.

Enter Beatrice and Lucretia below.

Noble ladies !

Beatr. Are ye resolved ?

Olim. Is he asleep ?

Mar. Is all

Quiet ?

Lucr. I mixed an opiate with his drink : 30
He sleeps so soundly —

Beatr. That his death will be
But as a change of sin-chastising dreams,
A dark continuance of the Hell within him,
Which God extinguish ! But ye are resolved ?
Ye know it is a high and holy deed ? 35

Olim. We are resolved.

Mar. As to the how this act
Be warranted, it rests with you.

Beatr. Well, follow !

Olim. Hush ! Hark ! What noise is that ?

Mar. Ha ! some one comes !

Beatr. Ye conscience-stricken cravens, rock to
rest

Your baby hearts. It is the iron gate, 40
Which ye left open, swinging to the wind,

That enters whistling as in scorn. Come, follow!
 And be your steps like mine, light, quick, and bold.
(Exeunt.)

SCENE III. *An Apartment in the Castle. Enter Beatrice and Lucretia.*

Lucretia. They are about it now.

Beatrice. Nay, it is done.

Lucr. I have not heard him groan.

Beatr. He will not groan.

Lucr. What sound is that?

Beatr. List! 'tis the tread of feet
 About his bed.

Lucr. My God!
 If he be now a cold, stiff corpse.

Beatr. O, fear not 5
 What may be done, but what is left undone:
 The act seals all.

Enter Olimpio and Marzio.

Is it accomplished?

Marzio. What?

Olimpio. Did you not call?

Beatr. When?

Olim. Now.

Beatr. I ask if all is over?

Olim. We dare not kill an old and sleeping
 man;
 His thin grey hair, his stern and reverent brow, 10

His veined hands crossed on his heaving breast,
And the calm innocent sleep in which he lay,
Quelled me. Indeed, indeed, I cannot do it.

Mar. But I was bolder; for I chid Olimpio,
And bade him bear his wrongs to his own grave 15
And leave me the reward. And now my knife
Touched the loose wrinkled throat, when the
old man

Stirred in his sleep, and said, "God! hear, O,
hear

"A father's curse! What art thou not our
father?"

And then he laughed. I knew it was the ghost 20
Of my dead father speaking through his lips,
And could not kill him.

Beatr. Miserable slaves!
Where, if ye dare not kill a sleeping man,
Found ye the boldness to return to me
With such a deed undone? Base palterers! 25
Cowards and traitors! Why, the very conscience
Which ye would sell for gold and for revenge
Is an equivocation: it sleeps over
A thousand daily acts disgracing men;
And when a deed where mercy insults heaven — 30
Why do I talk? (*Snatching a dagger from one of
them and raising it.*) Hadst thou a tongue
to say,

19 *What art.* Evidently, *What, art.*

She murdered her own father, I must do it !
But never dream ye shall outlive him long !

Olim. Stop, for God's sake !

Mar. I will go back and kill him.

Olim. Give me the weapon, we must do thy
will.

35

Beatr. Take it ! Depart ! Return !

(*Exeunt Olim* [*pio*] *and Mar* [*zio*].)

How pale thou art !

We do but that which 'twere a deadly crime
To leave undone.

Lucr. Would it were done !

Beatr. Even whilst

That doubt is passing through your mind, the
world

Is conscious of a change. Darkness and hell 40
Have swallowed up the vapour they sent forth
To blacken the sweet light of life. My breath
Comes, methinks, lighter, and the gellied blood
Runs freely through my veins. Hark !

[*Re*]-enter *Olimpio and Marzio*.

He is—

Olim.

Dead !

Mar. We strangled him that there might be
no blood ;

And then we threw his heavy corpse i' the 45
garden

Under the balcony ; 'twill seem it fell.

Beatr. (*giving them a bag of coin*). Here, take
this gold, and hasten to your homes.
And, Marzio, because thou wast only awed
By that which made me tremble, wear thou this! 50
(*Clothes him in a rich mantle.*)

It was the mantle which my grandfather
Wore in his high prosperity, and men
Envied his state: so may they envy thine.
Thou wert a weapon in the hand of God
To a just use. Live long and thrive! And, mark, 55
If thou hast crimes, repent: this deed is none.
(*A horn is sounded.*)

Lucr. Hark! 'tis the castle horn; my God!
it sounds,
Like the last trump.

Beatr. Some tedious guest is coming.

Lucr. The drawbridge is let down; there is
a tramp
Of horses in the court; fly, hide yourselves! 60
(*Exeunt Olim[pio] and Mar[zio].*)

Beatr. Let us retire to counterfeit deep rest;
I scarcely need to counterfeit it now:
The spirit which doth reign within these limbs
Seems strangely undisturbed. I could even sleep
Fearless and calm: all ill is surely past. 65
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE IV. *Another Apartment in the Castle. Enter on one side the Legate Savella, introduced by a Servant, and on the other Lucretia and Bernardo.*

Savella. Lady, my duty to his Holiness
Be my excuse that thus unseasonably
I break upon your rest. I must speak with
Count Cenci; doth he sleep?

Lucretia (in a hurried and confused manner). I
think he sleeps;

Yet, wake him not, I pray, spare me awhile, 5
He is a wicked and a wrathful man;
Should he be roused out of his sleep to-night,
Which is, I know, a hell of angry dreams,
It were not well; indeed it were not well.
Wait till day break — (*aside*) O, I am deadly
sick! 10

Sav. I grieve thus to distress you, but the
Count

Must answer charges of the gravest import,
And suddenly; such my commission is.

Lucr. (with increased agitation). I dare not
rouse him: I know none who dare: 15
'Twere perilous; — you might as safely waken
A serpent; or a corpse in which some fiend
Were laid to sleep.

Sav. Lady, my moments here

5 *awhile*. Query, period after this?

6 *a wrathful*. 1819 omits *a*.

Are counted. I must rouse him from his sleep,
Since none else dare.

Lucr. (aside). O, terror! O, despair!
(*To Bernardo.*) Bernardo, conduct you the Lord
Legate to
Your father's chamber.

20

(*Exeunt Sav[ella] and Bern[ardo].*)

Enter Beatrice.

Beatrice. 'Tis a messenger
Come to arrest the culprit who now stands
Before the throne of unappealable God.
Both Earth and Heaven, consenting arbiters,
Acquit our deed.

Lucr. Oh, agony of fear! 25
Would that he yet might live! Even now I heard
The Legate's followers whisper, as they passed,
They had a warrant for his instant death.
All was prepared by unforbidden means,
Which we must pay so dearly, having done. 30
Even now they search the tower, and find the
body;

Now they suspect the truth; now they consult
Before they come to tax us with the fact:
O, horrible, 'tis all discovered!

Beatr. Mother, 35
What is done wisely, is done well. Be bold
As thou art just. 'Tis like a truant child,
To fear that others know what thou hast done,

Even from thine own strong consciousness, and
thus

Write on unsteady eyes and altered cheeks
All thou wouldst hide. Be faithful to thyself,
And fear no other witness but thy fear.

For if, as cannot be, some circumstance
Should rise in accusation, we can blind
Suspicion with such cheap astonishment, 45
Or overbear it with such guiltless pride,
As murderers cannot feign. The deed is done,
And what may follow now regards not me.

I am as universal as the light;
Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm 50
As the world's centre. Consequence, to me,
Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock
But shakes it not. (*A cry within and tumult.*)

Voices. Murder! Murder! Murder!

[*Re-*]enter *Bernardo and Savella.*

Sav. (to his followers). Go, search the castle
round; sound the alarm;

Look to the gates that none escape!

Beatr. What now?

Bernardo. I know not what to say: my father's
dead!

Beatr. How? dead? he only sleeps: you mis- 55
take, brother.

His sleep is very calm, very like death;
'Tis wonderful how well a tyrant sleeps.
He is not *dead*?

Ber. Dead ! murdered !

Lucr. (with extreme agitation). Oh, no, no,
He is not murdered, though he may be dead ; 60
I have alone the keys of those apartments.

Sav. Ha ! Is it so ?

Beatr. My Lord, I pray excuse us ;
We will retire ; my mother is not well :
She seems quite overcome with this strange
horror. (*Exeunt Lucr[etia] and Beatr[ice].*)

Sav. Can you suspect who may have murdered him ? 65

Ber. I know not what to think.

Sav. Can you name any
Who had an interest in his death ?

Ber. Alas !
I can name none who had not, and those most
Who most lament that such a deed is done ;
My mother, and my sister, and myself. 70

Sav. 'Tis strange ! There were clear marks
of violence.

I found the old man's body in the moonlight
Hanging beneath the window of his chamber,
Among the branches of a pine : he could not
Have fallen there, for all his limbs lay heaped 75
And effortless ; 'tis true there was no blood.
Favour me, Sir, (it much imports your house
That all should be made clear) to tell the ladies
That I request their presence. (*Exit Ber[nardo].*)

Enter Guards, bringing in Marzio.

Guard. We have one.

Officer. My Lord, we found this ruffian and
another 80

Lurking among the rocks; there is no doubt
But that they are the murderers of Count Cenci:
Each had a bag of coin; this fellow wore
A gold-inwoven robe, which, shining bright
Under the dark rocks to the glimmering moon, 85
Betrayed them to our notice: the other fell
Desperately fighting.

Sav. What does he confess?

Officer. He keeps firm silence; but these lines
found on him

May speak.

Sav. Their language is at least sincere.
(*Reads.*)

“TO THE LADY BEATRICE.

“That the atonement of what my nature 90
sickens to conjecture may soon arrive, I send
thee, at thy brother’s desire, those who will speak
and do more than I dare write—

Thy devoted servant,

“ORSINO.”

Enter Lucretia, Beatrice, and Bernardo.

Knowest thou this writing, Lady?

Beatr.

No.

Sav.

Nor thou? 95

Lucr. (*Her conduct throughout the scene is marked by extreme agitation.*) Where was it found? What is it? It should be Orsino's hand! It speaks of that strange horror Which never yet found utterance, but which made Between that hapless child and her dead father A gulph of obscure hatred.

Sav. Is it so? 100
Is it true, Lady, that thy father did
Such outrages as to awaken in thee
Unfilial hate?

Beatr. Not hate, 'twas more than hate:
This is most true, yet wherefore question me?

Sav. There is a deed demanding question
done; 105
Thou hast a secret which will answer not.

Beatr. What sayest? My Lord, your words
are bold and rash.

Sav. I do arrest all present in the name
Of the Pope's Holiness. You must to Rome.

Lucr. O, not to Rome! Indeed we are not
guilty. 110

Beatr. Guilty! Who dares talk of guilt? My
Lord,

I am more innocent of parricide
Than is a child born fatherless. Dear mother,
Your gentleness and patience are no shield
For this keen-judging world, this two-edged lie, 115

Which seems, but is not. What! will human
 laws,
Rather will ye who are their ministers,
Bar all access to retribution first,
And then, when heaven doth interpose to do
What ye neglect, arming familiar things 120
To the redress of an unwonted crime,
Make ye the victims who demanded it
Culprits? 'Tis ye are culprits! That poor wretch
Who stands so pale, and trembling, and amazed,
If it be true he murdered Cenci, was 125
A sword in the right hand of justest God.
Wherefore should I have wielded it? Unless
The crimes which mortal tongue dare never name
God therefore scruples to avenge.

Sav.

You own

That you desired his death?

Beatr.

It would have been 130

A crime no less than his, if, for one moment,
That fierce desire had faded in my heart.
'Tis true I did believe, and hope, and pray,
Ay, I even knew — for God is wise and just,
That some strange sudden death hung over him. 135
'Tis true that this did happen, and most true
There was no other rest for me on earth,
No other hope in Heaven: now what of this?

Sav. Strange thoughts beget strange deeds;
 and here are both:

I judge thee not.

Beatr. And yet, if you arrest me, 140
You are the judge and executioner
Of that which is the life of life : the breath
Of accusation kills an innocent name,
And leaves for lame acquittal the poor life
Which is a mask without it. 'Tis most false 145
That I am guilty of foul parricide ;
Although I must rejoice, for justest cause,
That other hands have sent my father's soul
To ask the mercy he denied to me.
Now leave us free : stain not a noble house 150
With vague surmises of rejected crime ;
Add to our sufferings and your own neglect
No heavier sum ; let them have been enough ;
Leave us the wreck we have.

Sav. I dare not, Lady.
I pray that you prepare yourselves for Rome : 155
There the Pope's further pleasure will be known.

Lucr. O, not to Rome ! O, take us not to
Rome !

Beatr. Why not to Rome, dear mother ? There
as here
Our innocence is as an armed heel
To trample accusation. God is there, 160
As here, and with his shadow ever clothes
The innocent, the injured, and the weak ;
And such are we. Cheer up, dear Lady, lean
On me ; collect your wandering thoughts. My
Lord,

As soon as you have taken some refreshment, 165
And had all such examinations made
Upon the spot, as may be necessary
To the full understanding of this matter,
We shall be ready. Mother, will you come?

Lucr. Ha! they will bind us to the rack, and

wrest

170

Self-accusation from our agony!

Will Giacomo be there? Orsino? Marzio?

All present; all confronted; all demanding

Each from the other's countenance the thing

Which is in every heart! O, misery!

175

(She faints, and is borne out.)

Sav. She faints: an ill appearance this.

Beatr.

My Lord,

She knows not yet the uses of the world.

She fears that power is as a beast which grasps

And loosens not; a snake, whose look transmutes

All things to guilt which is its nutriment;

180

She cannot know how well the supine slaves

Of blind authority read the truth of things

When written on a brow of guilelessness:

She sees not yet triumphant Innocence

Stand at the judgment-seat of mortal man,

185

A judge and an accuser of the wrong

Which drags it there. Prepare yourself, my Lord;

Our suite will join yours in the court below.

(Exeunt.)

End of the Fourth Act.

ACT V.

SCENE I. *An Apartment in Orsino's Palace. Enter Orsino and Giacomo.*

Giacomo. Do evil deeds thus quickly come to end?

O, that the vain remorse which must chastise
Crimes done, had but as loud a voice to warn
As its keen sting is mortal to avenge!

O, that the hour when present had cast off
The mantle of its mystery, and shewn
The ghastly form with which it now returns
When its scared game is roused, cheering the
hounds

Of conscience to their prey! Alas! Alas!
It was a wicked thought, a piteous deed,
To kill an old and hoary-headed father.

Orsino. It has turned out unluckily, in truth.

Giac. To violate the sacred doors of sleep;
To cheat kind nature of the placid death
Which she prepares for over-wearied age;
To drag from Heaven an unrepentant soul,
Which might have quenched in reconciling
prayers

A life of burning crimes—

Ors. You cannot say
I urged you to the deed.

Giac. O, had I never
Found in thy smooth and ready countenance 20
The mirror of my darkest thoughts ; hadst thou
Never with hints and questions made me look
Upon the monster of my thought, until
It grew familiar to desire —

Ors. 'Tis thus
Men cast the blame of their unprosperous acts 25
Upon the abettors of their own resolve ;
Or any thing but their weak, guilty selves.
And yet, confess the truth, it is the peril
In which you stand that gives you this pale sick-
ness

Of penitence ; confess 'tis fear disguised 30
From its own shame that takes the mantle now
Of thin remorse. What if we yet were safe ?

Giac. How can that be ? Already Beatrice,
Lucretia, and the murderer, are in prison.
I doubt not officers are, whilst we speak, 35
Sent to arrest us.

Ors. I have all prepared
For instant flight. We can escape even now,
So we take fleet occasion by the hair.

Giac. Rather expire in tortures, as I may.
What ! will you cast by self-accusing flight 40
Assured conviction upon Beatrice ?
She, who alone in this unnatural work,
Stands like God's angel ministered upon

By fiends ; avenging such a nameless wrong
As turns black parricide to piety ; 45
Whilst we for basest ends — I fear, Orsino,
While I consider all your words and looks,
Comparing them with your proposal now,
That you must be a villain. For what end
Could you engage in such a perilous crime, 50
Training me on with hints, and signs, and
smiles,

Even to this gulph ? Thou art no liar ? No,
Thou art a lie ! Traitor and murderer !
Coward and slave ! But, no, defend thyself ;
(Drawing.) Let the sword speak what the in-
dignant tongue 55

Disdains to brand thee with.

Ors.

Put up your weapon.

Is it the desperation of your fear
Makes you thus rash and sudden with a friend,
Now ruined for your sake ? If honest anger
Have moved you, know, that what I just pro-
posed 60

Was but to try you. As for me, I think
Thankless affection led me to this point,
From which, if my firm temper could repent,
I cannot now recede. Even whilst we speak
The ministers of justice wait below : 65
They grant me these brief moments. Now if you
Have any words of melancholy comfort

To speak to your pale wife, 'twere best to pass
Out at the postern, and avoid them so.

Giac. O, generous friend! how canst thou
pardon me? 70

Would that my life could purchase thine!

Ors. That wish
Now comes a day too late. Haste; fare thee
well!

Hear'st thou not steps along the corridor?

(*Exit Giacomo.*)

I'm sorry for it; but the guards are waiting
At his own gate, and such was my contrivance 75
That I might rid me both of him and them.

I thought to act a solemn comedy

Upon the painted scene of this new world,

And to attain my own peculiar ends

By some such plot of mingled good and ill 80

As others weave; but there arose a Power

Which graspt and snapped the threads of my
device,

And turned it to a net of ruin — Ha!

(*A shout is heard.*)

Is that my name I hear proclaimed abroad?

But I will pass, wrapt in a vile disguise; 85

Rags on my back, and a false innocence

Upon my face, through the misdeeming crowd

Which judges by what seems. 'Tis easy then

For a new name and for a country new,

And a new life, fashioned on old desires, 90
To change the honours of abandoned Rome.
And these must be the masks of that within,
Which must remain unaltered. Oh, I fear
That what is past will never let me rest !
Why, when none else is conscious but myself 95
Of my misdeeds, should my own heart's con-
tempt
Trouble me ? Have I not the power to fly
My own reproaches ? Shall I be the slave
Of — what ? A word ? which those of this false
world
Employ against each other, not themselves ; 100
As men wear daggers not for self-offence.
But if I am mistaken, where shall I
Find the disguise to hide me from myself,
As now I skulk from every other eye ? (*Exit.*)

SCENE II. *A Hall of Justice. Camillo, Judges, &c.,
are discovered seated. Marzio is led in.*

First Judge. Accused, do you persist in your
denial ?

I ask you, are you innocent, or guilty ?
I demand who were the participators
In your offence ? Speak truth and the whole
truth.

Marzio. My God ! I did not kill him ; I know
nothing ;

Olimpio sold the robe to me from which
You would infer my guilt.

Second Judge. Away with him !

First Judge. Dare you, with lips yet white
from the rack's kiss,

Speak false ? Is it so soft a questioner
That you would bandy lover's talk with it 10
Till it wind out your life and soul ? Away !

Mar. Spare me ! O, spare ! I will confess.

First Judge. Then speak.

Mar. I strangled him in his sleep.

First Judge. Who urged you to it ?

Mar. His own son Giacomo, and the young
prelate

Orsino sent me to Petrella ; there 15

The ladies Beatrice and Lucretia

Tempted me with a thousand crowns, and I

And my companion forthwith murdered him.

Now let me die.

First Judge. This sounds as bad as truth.

Guards, there, lead forth the prisoners.

Enter Lucretia, Beatrice, and Giacomo, guarded.

Look upon this man ; 20

When did you see him last ?

Beatrice. We never saw him.

Mar. You know me too well, Lady Beatrice.

Beatr. I know thee ! How ? where ? when ?

Mar. You know 'twas I

Whom you did urge with menaces and bribes
To kill your father. When the thing was done 25
You clothed me in a robe of woven gold
And bade me thrive : how I have thriven, you
see.

You, my Lord Giacomo, Lady Lucretia,
You know that what I speak is true.

*(Beatrice advances towards him ; he covers
his face, and shrinks back.)*

O, dart

The terrible resentment of those eyes 30
On the dead earth ! Turn them away from me !
They wound : 'twas torture forced the truth.
My Lords,

Having said this, let me be led to death.

Beatr. Poor wretch, I pity thee : yet stay
awhile.

Camillo. Guards, lead him not away.

Beatr. Cardinal Camillo, 35

You have a good repute for gentleness
And wisdom : can it be that you sit here
To countenance a wicked farce like this ?
When some obscure and trembling slave is
dragged
From sufferings which might shake the sternest
heart, 40

And bade to answer, not as he believes,
But as those may suspect or do desire,

Whose questions thence suggest their own reply ;
And that in peril of such hideous torments
As merciful God spares even the damned. Speak
now

45

The thing you surely know, which is, that you
If your fine frame were stretched upon that
wheel,

And you were told : " Confess that you did poison
Your little nephew ; that fair blue-eyed child
Who was the loadstar of your life : " — and though 50
All see, since his most swift and piteous death,
That day and night, and heaven and earth, and
time,

And all the things hoped for or done therein
Are changed to you, through your exceeding
grief,

Yet you would say, " I confess anything : " 55
And beg from your tormentors, like that slave,
The refuge of dishonourable death.
I pray thee, Cardinal, that thou assert
My innocence.

Cam. (much moved). What shall we think, my
Lords ?

Shame on these tears ! I thought the heart was
frozen

60

Which is their fountain. I would pledge my soul
That she is guiltless.

Judge. Yet she must be tortured.

Cam. I would as soon have tortured mine
own nephew :

(If he now lived he would be just her age ;
His hair, too, was her colour, and his eyes 65
Like hers in shape, but blue and not so deep)
As that most perfect image of God's love
That ever came sorrowing upon the earth.
She is as pure as speechless infancy!

Judge. Well, be her purity on your head, my
Lord, 70

If you forbid the rack. His Holiness
Enjoined us to pursue this monstrous crime
By the severest forms of law ; nay, even
To stretch a point against the criminals.
The prisoners stand accused of parricide 75
Upon such evidence as justifies
Torture.

Beatr. What evidence ? This man's ?

Judge. Even so.

Beatr. (to Marzio). Come near. And who art
thou thus chosen forth
Out of the multitude of living men,
To kill the innocent ?

Mar. I am Marzio, 80
Thy father's vassal.

Beatr. Fix thine eyes on mine ;
Answer to what I ask. (*Turning to the Judges.*) I
prithee mark

His countenance: unlike bold calumny
Which sometimes dares not speak the thing it
looks,

He dares not look the thing he speaks, but bends 85
His gaze on the blind earth. (*To Marzio.*) What!
wilt thou say

That I did murder my own father?

Mar.

Oh!

Spare me! My brain swims round — I cannot
speak —

It was that horrid torture forced the truth.

Take me away! Let her not look on me! 90

I am a guilty, miserable wretch;

I have said all I know; now, let me die!

Beatr. My Lords, if by my nature I had been
So stern, as to have planned the crime alleged,
Which your suspicions dictate to this slave, 95
And the rack makes him utter, do you think
I should have left this two-edged instrument
Of my misdeed; this man, this bloody knife
With my own name engraven on the hilt
Lying unsheathed amid a world of foes, 100
For my own death? That with such horrible
need

For deepest silence, I should have neglected
So trivial a precaution, as the making
His tomb the keeper of a secret written
On a thief's memory? What is his poor life? 105

What are a thousand lives ? A parricide
Had trampled them like dust ; and see, he lives !
(*Turning to Marzio.*) And thou —

Mar. Oh, spare me ! Speak to me
no more !

That stern yet piteous look, those solemn tones,
Wound worse than torture. (*To the Judges.*) I
have told it all ; 110

For pity's sake lead me away to death.

Cam. Guards, lead him nearer the Lady Bea-
trice,

He shrinks from her regard like autumn's leaf
From the keen breath of the serenest north.

Beatr. Oh, thou who tremblest on the giddy
verge 115

Of life and death, pause ere thou answerest me ;
So mayst thou answer God with less dismay :
What evil have we done thee ? I, alas !
Have lived but on this earth a few sad years
And so my lot was ordered, that a father 120
First turned the moments of awakening life
To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope ; and
then

Stabbed with one blow my everlasting soul ;
And my untainted fame ; and even that peace
Which sleeps within the core of the heart's heart. 125
But the wound was not mortal ; so my hate
Became the only worship I could lift

To our great father, who in pity and love,
Armed thee, as thou dost say, to cut him off;
And thus his wrong becomes my accusation; 130
And art thou the accuser? If thou hopest
Mercy in heaven, shew justice upon earth:
Worse than a bloody hand is a hard heart.

If thou hast done murders, made thy life's path
Over the trampled laws of God and man, 135
Rush not before thy Judge, and say: "My
Maker,

" I have done this and more; for there was one

" Who was most pure and innocent on earth;

" And because she endured what never any,

" Guilty or innocent, endured before; 140

" Because her wrongs could not be told, not
thought;

" Because thy hand at length did rescue her;

" I with my words killed her and all her kin."

Think, I adjure you, what it is to slay

The reverence living in the minds of men 145

Towards our ancient house, and stainless fame!

Think what it is to strangle infant pity,

Cradled in the belief of guileless looks,

Till it become a crime to suffer. Think

What 'tis to blot with infamy and blood 150

All that which shews like innocence, and is,

Hear me, great God! I swear, most innocent,

So that the world lose all discrimination

Between the sly, fierce, wild regard of guilt,
And that which now compels thee to reply 155
To what I ask: Am I, or am I not
A parricide?

Mar. Thou art not!

Judge. What is this?

Mar. I here declare those whom I did accuse

Are innocent. 'Tis I alone am guilty.

Judge. Drag him away to torments; let them
be 160

Subtle and long drawn out, to tear the folds
Of the heart's inmost cell. Unbind him not
Till he confess.

Mar. Torture me as ye will:
A keener pang has wrung a higher truth
From my last breath. She is most innocent! 165
Bloodhounds, not men, glut yourselves well with
me;

I will not give you that fine piece of nature
To rend and ruin. (*Exit Marzio, guarded.*)

Cam. What say ye now, my Lords?

Judge. Let tortures strain the truth till it be
white

As snow thrice sifted by the frozen wind. 170

Cam. Yet stained with blood.

Judge (to Beatrice). Know you this paper,
Lady?

Beatr. Entrap me not with questions. Who
stands here
As my accuser? Ha! wilt thou be he,
Who art my judge? Accuser, witness, judge,
What, all in one? Here is Orsino's name; 175
Where is Orsino? Let his eye meet mine.
What means this scrawl? Alas! ye know not
what,
And therefore on the chance that it may be
Some evil, will ye kill us?

Enter an Officer.

Officer. Marzio's dead.

Judge. What did he say?

Officer. Nothing. As soon as we 180
Had bound him on the wheel, he smiled on us,
As one who baffles a deep adversary;
And holding his breath, died.

Judge. There remains nothing
But to apply the question to those prisoners,
Who yet remain stubborn.

Cam. I overrule 185
Further proceedings, and in the behalf
Of these most innocent and noble persons
Will use my interest with the Holy Father.

Judge. Let the Pope's pleasure then be done.
Meanwhile
Conduct these culprits each to separate cells; 190
And be the engines ready: for this night,

If the Pope's resolution be as grave,
Pious, and just as once, I'll wring the truth
Out of those nerves and sinews, groan by groan.
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE III. *The Cell of a Prison. Beatrice is discovered asleep on a Couch. Enter Bernardo.*

Bernardo. How gently slumber rests upon her
face,

Like the last thoughts of some day sweetly spent
Closing in night and dreams, and so prolonged.
After such torments as she bore last night,
How light and soft her breathing comes. Ay,
me!

5

Methinks that I shall never sleep again.
But I must shake the heavenly dew of rest
From this sweet folded flower, thus — wake!
awake!

What, sister, canst thou sleep?

Beatrice (awaking). I was just dreaming
That we were all in Paradise. Thou knowest 10
This cell seems like a kind of Paradise
After our father's presence.

Ber. Dear, dear sister,
Would that thy dream were not a dream! O, God!
How shall I tell?

Beatr. What wouldst thou tell, sweet
brother?

Ber. Look not so calm and happy, or even
whilst

15

I stand considering what I have to say
My heart will break.

Beatr. See now, thou mak'st me weep :
How very friendless thou wouldst be, dear child,
If I were dead. Say what thou hast to say.

Ber. They have confessed; they could endure
no more

20

The tortures —

Beatr. Ha ! What was there to confess ?
They must have told some weak and wicked lie
To flatter their tormentors. Have they said
That they were guilty ? O, white innocence,
That thou shouldst wear the mask of guilt to hide 25
Thine awful and serenest countenance
From those who know thee not !

Enter Judge, with Lucretia and Giacomo, guarded.

Ignoble hearts !

For some brief spasms of pain, which are at least
As mortal as the limbs through which they pass,
Are centuries of high splendour laid in dust ? 30
And that eternal honour which should live
Sun-like, above the reek of mortal fame,
Changed to a mockery and a bye-word ? What !
Will you give up these bodies to be dragged
At horses' heels, so that our hair should sweep 35
The footsteps of the vain and senseless crowd,

Who, that they may make our calamity
Their worship and their spectacle, will leave
The churches and the theatres as void
As their own hearts? Shall the light multitude 40
Fling, at their choice, curses or faded pity,
Sad funeral flowers to deck a living corpse,
Upon us as we pass to pass away,
And leave—what memory of our having been?
Infamy, blood, terror, despair? O thou, 45
Who wert a mother to the parentless,
Kill not thy child! Let not her wrongs kill
thee!

Brother, lie down with me upon the rack,
And let us each be silent as a corpse;
It soon will be as soft as any grave. 50
'Tis but the falsehood it can wring from fear
Makes the rack cruel.

Giacomo. They will tear the truth
Even from thee at last, those cruel pains:
For pity's sake say thou art guilty now.

Lucr. O, speak the truth! Let us all quickly
die; 55
And after death, God is our judge, not they;
He will have mercy on us.

Ber. If indeed
It can be true, say so, dear sister mine;
And then the Pope will surely pardon you,
And all be well.

Judge. Confess, or I will warp 60
Your limbs with such keen tortures —

Beatr. Tortures ! Turn
The rack henceforth into a spinning-wheel !
Torture your dog, that he may tell when last
He lapped the blood his master shed — not me !
My pangs are of the mind, and of the heart, 65
And of the soul ; ay, of the inmost soul,
Which weeps within tears as of burning gall
To see, in this ill world where none are true,
My kindred false to their deserted selves.
And with considering all the wretched life 70
Which I have lived, and its now wretched end,
And the small justice shewn by Heaven and Earth
To me or mine ; and what a tyrant thou art,
And what slaves these ; and what a world we make,
The oppressor and the oppressed — such pangs
compel 75

My answer. What is it thou wouldst with me ?

Judge. Art thou not guilty of thy father's death ?

Beatr. Or wilt thou rather tax high judging
God

That he permitted such an act as that
Which I have suffered, and which he beheld ; 80
Made it unutterable, and took from it
All refuge, all revenge, all consequence,
But that which thou hast called my father's death ?
Which is or is not what men call a crime,

Which either I have done, or have not done; 85
Say what ye will. I shall deny no more.

If ye desire it thus, thus let it be.
And so an end of all. Now do your will;
No other pains shall force another word.

Judge. She is convicted, but has not confessed. 90
Be it enough. Until their final sentence
Let none have converse with them. You, young
Lord,

Linger not here!

Beatr. O, tear him not away!

Judge. Guards! do your duty.

Ber. (embracing Beatrice). Oh! would ye divide
Body from soul?

Officer. That is the headsman's business. 95
(*Exeunt all but Lucr[etia], Beatr[ice],
and Giac[omo].*)

Giac. Have I confessed? Is it all over now?
No hope! No refuge! O weak, wicked tongue,
Which hast destroyed me, would that thou hadst
been

Cut out and thrown to dogs first! To have
killed

My father first, and then betrayed my sister; 100
Ay, thee! the one thing innocent and pure
In this black, guilty world, to that which I
So well deserve! My wife! my little ones!

99 *dogs first!* 1819, erroneously, *dogs first?*

Destitute, helpless, and I — Father ! God !
Canst thou forgive even the unforgiving, 105
When their full hearts break thus, thus !
(*Covers his face, and weeps.*)

Lucr. O, my child !
To what a dreadful end are we all come !
Why did I yield ? Why did I not sustain
Those torments ? Oh, that I were all dissolved
Into these fast and unavailing tears, 110
Which flow and feel not !

Beatr. What 'twas weak to do,
'Tis weaker to lament, once being done ;
Take cheer ! The God who knew my wrong,
and made
Our speedy act the angel of his wrath,
Seems, and but seems to have abandoned us. 115
Let us not think that we shall die for this.
Brother, sit near me ; give me your firm hand,
You had a manly heart. Bear up ! Bear up !
O, dearest Lady, put your gentle head
Upon my lap, and try to sleep awhile : 120
Your eyes look pale, hollow, and overworn,
With heaviness of watching and slow grief.
Come, I will sing you some low, sleepy tune,
Not cheerful, nor yet sad ; some dull old thing,
Some outworn and unused monotony, 125
Such as our country gossips sing and spin,
Till they almost forget they live : lie down !

So, that will do. Have I forgot the words?
Faith! They are sadder than I thought they were.

SONG.

False friend, wilt thou smile or weep 130
When my life is laid asleep?
Little cares for a smile or a tear,
The clay-cold corpse upon the bier!
Farewell! Heighho!
What is this whispers low? 135
There is a snake in thy smile, my dear;
And bitter poison within thy tear.

Sweet sleep, were death like to thee,
Or if thou couldst mortal be,
I would close these eyes of pain; 140
When to wake? Never again.
O World! Farewell!
Listen to the passing bell!
It says, thou and I must part,
With a light and a heavy heart. 145

(*The scene closes.*)

SCENE IV. *A Hall of the Prison. Enter Camillo and Bernardo.*

Camillo. The Pope is stern; not to be moved
or bent.

He looked as calm and keen as is the engine
Which tortures and which kills, exempt itself
From aught that it inflicts; a marble form,

A rite, a law, a custom : not a man. 5
He frowned, as if to frown had been the trick
Of his machinery, on the advocates
Presenting the defences, which he tore
And threw behind, muttering with hoarse, harsh
voice :

"Which among ye defended their old father 10
"Killed in his sleep?" Then to another :
"Thou

"Dost this in virtue of thy place ; 'tis well."
He turned to me then, looking deprecation,
And said these three words, coldly : " They must
die."

Bernardo. And yet you left him not ?

Cam. I urged him still ; 15
Pleading, as I could guess, the devilish wrong
Which prompted your unnatural parent's death.
And he replied : " Paolo Santa Croce
"Murdered his mother yester evening,
"And he is fled. Parricide grows so rife, 20
"That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the
young
"Will strangle us all, dozing in our chairs.
"Authority, and power, and hoary hair,
"Are grown crimes capital. You are my nephew,
"You come to ask their pardon ; stay a moment ; 25
"Here is their sentence ; never see me more
"Till, to the letter, it be all fulfilled."

Ber. O, God, not so ! I did believe indeed
That all you said was but sad preparation
For happy news. O, there are words and looks 30
To bend the sternest purpose ! Once I knew
them,

Now I forget them at my dearest need.
What think you if I seek him out and bathe
His feet and robe with hot and bitter tears ?
Importune him with prayers, vexing his brain 35
With my perpetual cries, until in rage
He strike me with his pastoral cross, and trample
Upon my prostrate head, so that my blood
May stain the senseless dust on which he treads,
And remorse waken mercy ? I will do it ! 40
O, wait till I return ! (*Rushes out.*)

Cam. Alas ! poor boy !
A wreck-devoted seaman thus might pray
To the deaf sea.

Enter Lucretia, Beatrice, and Giacomo, guarded.

Beatrice. I hardly dare to fear
That thou bring'st other news than a just pardon.

Cam. May God in heaven be less inexorable 45
To the Pope's prayers, than he has been to mine.
Here is the sentence and the warrant.

Beatr. (wildly). Oh,
My God ! Can it be possible I have
To die so suddenly ? So young to go

Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground ! 50
To be nailed down into a narrow place ;
To see no more sweet sunshine ; hear no more
Blithe voice of living thing ; muse not again
Upon familiar thoughts, sad, yet thus lost —
How fearful ! To be nothing ! Or to be — 55
What ? O, where am I ? Let me not go mad !
Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts ! If there
should be
No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void
world ;
The wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled
world !
If all things then should be — my father's
spirit, 60
His eye, his voice, his touch, surrounding me ;
The atmosphere and breath of my dead life !
If sometimes, as a shape more like himself,
Even the form which tortured me on earth,
Masked in grey hairs and wrinkles, he should
come 65
And wind me in his hellish arms, and fix
His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down,
down !
For was he not alone omnipotent
On Earth, and ever present ? Even tho' dead,
Does not his spirit live in all that breathe, 70
And work for me and mine still the same ruin,

Scorn, pain, despair? Who ever yet returned
To teach the laws of death's untrodden realm?
Unjust perhaps as those which drive us now,
O, whither, whither?

Lucretia. Trust in God's sweet love, 75
The tender promises of Christ: ere night,
Think we shall be in Paradise.

Beatr. 'Tis past!
Whatever comes, my heart shall sink no more.
And yet, I know not why, your words strike chill:
How tedious, false, and cold seem all things. I 80
Have met with much injustice in this world;
No difference has been made by God or man,
Or any power moulding my wretched lot,
'Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.
I am cut off from the only world I know, 85
From light, and life, and love, in youth's sweet
prime.

You do well telling me to trust in God,
I hope I do trust in him. In whom else
Can any trust? And yet my heart is cold.

(During the latter speeches Giacomo has retired conversing with Camillo, who now goes out. Giacomo advances.)

Giacomo. Know you not, mother—sister,
know you not? 90
Bernardo even now is gone to implore
The Pope to grant our pardon.

Lucr. Child, perhaps
It will be granted. We may all then live
To make these woes a tale for distant years:
O, what a thought! It gushes to my heart 95
Like the warm blood.

Beatr. Yet both will soon be cold.
O, trample out that thought! Worse than de-
spair,
Worse than the bitterness of death, is hope:
It is the only ill which can find place
Upon the giddy, sharp and narrow hour 100
Tottering beneath us. Plead with the swift
frost

That it should spare the eldest flower of spring:
Plead with awakening earthquake, o'er whose
couch

Even now a city stands, strong, fair and free;
Now stench and blackness yawn, like death. O,
plead 105

With famine, or wind-walking pestilence,
Blind lightning, or the deaf sea, not with man!
Cruel, cold, formal man! righteous in words,
In deeds a Cain. No, mother, we must die:
Since such is the reward of innocent lives; 110
Such the alleviation of worst wrongs.

And whilst our murderers live, and hard, cold
men,

Smiling and slow, walk thro' a world of tears

105 *yawn.* 1819, *yawns.*

To death as to life's sleep; 'twere just the grave
Were some strange joy for us. Come, obscure
Death, 115
And wind me in thine all-embracing arms!
Like a fond mother hide me in thy bosom,
And rock me to the sleep from which none wake.
Live ye, who live, subject to one another
As we were once, who now —

Bernardo rushes in.

Ber. Oh, horrible! 120
That tears, that looks, that hope poured forth in
prayer,
Even till the heart is vacant and despairs,
Should all be vain! The ministers of death
Are waiting round the doors. I thought I saw
Blood on the face of one — what if 'twere
fancy? 125
Soon the heart's blood of all I love on earth
Will sprinkle him, and he will wipe it off
As if 'twere only rain. O, life! O, world!
Cover me! let me be no more! To see
That perfect mirror of pure innocence 130
Wherein I gazed, and grew happy and good,
Shivered to dust! To see thee, Beatrice,
Who made all lovely thou didst look upon —
Thee, light of life — dead, dark! while I say,
sister,
To hear I have no sister; and thou, Mother, 135

Whose love was [as] a bond to all our loves —
Dead ! The sweet bond broken !

Enter Camillo and Guards.

They come . Let me
Kiss those warm lips before their crimson leaves
Are blighted — white — cold. Say farewell, be-
fore

Death chokes that gentle voice ! O, let me hear 140
You speak !

Beatr. Farewell, my tender brother.
Think

Of our sad fate with gentleness, as now :
And let mild pitying thoughts lighten for thee
Thy sorrow's load. Err not in harsh despair,
But tears and patience. One thing more, my
child, 145

For thine own sake be constant to the love
Thou bearest us ; and to the faith that I,
Though wrapt in a strange cloud of crime and
shame,

Lived ever holy and unstained. And though
Ill tongues shall wound me, and our common
name 150

Be as a mark stamped on thine innocent brow
For men to point at as they pass, do thou
Forbear, and never think a thought unkind
Of those, who perhaps love thee in their graves.

136 *as.* 1819, 1821 omit. Suggested by Rossetti.

So mayest thou die as I do ; fear and pain 155
Being subdued. Farewell ! farewell ! farewell !

Ber. I cannot say, farewell !

Cam. O, Lady Beatrice !

Beatr. Give yourself no unnecessary pain,
My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, Mother, tie
My girdle for me, and bind up this hair 160
In any simple knot ; ay, that does well.
And yours I see is coming down. How often
Have we done this for one another ! now
We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well. 165

The End.

Notes

3. Dedication. Shelley to Hunt, September 3, 1819 :

"I have written something and finished it, different from anything else, and a new attempt for me ; and I mean to dedicate it to you. I should not have done so without your approbation, but I asked your picture last night, and it smiled assent. If I did not think it in some degree worthy of you, I would not make you a public offering of it. I expect to have to write to you soon about it. If Ollier is not turned Christian, Jew, or become infected with *the Murrain*, he will publish it. Don't let him be frightened, for it is nothing which by any courtesy of language can be termed either moral or immoral."

Shelley to Hunt, April 5, 1820 :

"It appears to me that you excell in the power of delineating passion ; and, what is more necessary, of connecting and developing it. This latter part of a dramatic writer's business is to me an incredible effort ; if I have in any degree succeeded, I shall have at least earned the applause. . . . I am afraid the subject [*The Cenci*] will not please you, but at least you will read my justification of it in the preface. I lay much stress upon that argument against a diversity of opinion to be produced by works of imagination. The very Theatre rejected it with expressions of the greatest insolence. I feel persuaded that they must have guessed at the author. But about all this I don't much care."

Hunt's final judgment, condensed from his early notice in *The Indicator*, is given in his memoir of Shelley printed in *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, vol. i: "His [Shelley's] completest production is unquestionably the tragedy of the *Cenci*. The objections to the subject are, on the face of them, not altogether unfounded ; but they ought not to weigh with those who have no scruple in grappling with any of the subjects of our old English drama ; still less if they are true readers of that drama, and know how to think of the great ends of poetry in a liberal and

masculine manner. *Cenci* is the personification of a will, maddened, like a Roman emperor's, by the possession of impunity; deadened to all sense of right and wrong by degrading notions of a Supreme Being; and consequently subjected to the most frightful wants, and knowing no pleasure but in sensuality or malignity. The least of his actions becomes villainous, because he does it in defiance of principle. On the other hand his death by the hand of his outraged daughter produces a different meeting of extremes, because it results, however madly, from horror at the violation of principle. . . . Considering what an excellent production the *Cenci* is, it is certainly difficult to help wishing that the subject had been of a nature to startle nobody; but it may be as truly added, that such a subject could have been handled by no other writer in a manner less offensive, or more able to suggest its own vindication."

16, 24-25. rated . . . life. The meaning is, the fine for the secret crime could not have been greater than for the murder which had been discovered and was to be compounded.

19, 100. And. The insertion is made in Shelley's *Errata*, but Forman suggests that he intended also to delete *yet*. The present editor, in his editions, adopted this suggestion. Mrs. Shelley and Rossetti restore the text of 1819. Forman, Dowden and Hutchinson follow 1821.

19, 111-113. The dry . . . Christ. Locock, *Examination of the Shelley Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, gives the first draft of these lines as a fragment of *Prince Athanase*:

"Yet often when the eyes are cold & dry
And the lips calm, the Spirit weeps within
Tears bitterer than [Christ's] the blood of agony."

He adds a second version from *Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, after line 27:

"Or looks that tell that while the lips are calm
And the eyes cold, the spirit weeps within
Tears like the sanguine sweat of agony."

21. Scene II. Orsino. Swinburne comments on the part: "What was the latent breadth or depth of Shelley's dramatic genius we cannot say, as he had not time himself to know. It is incomplete in the *Cenci*; for example, in the figure of Orsino the lines are not cut sharp and deep enough; he is drawn too easily and

lightly; the picture looks thin and shadowy beside the vivid image we get from the old report of the Cenci trial. That sketch of Monsignor Guerra, the tall delicate young priest, with long curls and courtly graces, playing on crime as on a lute, with fine fingers used to music-making, might have been thrown out in keen relief against the great figure of Cenci; a Caponsacchi turned ignoble instead of noble, and as well worth drawing, had the hand been there to draw. As it is, he plays but a poor part, borne up only by the sweet strength of Shelley's verse." *Fortnightly Review*, May, 1869.

30, 104. were. Rossetti conjectures *are* or *wear*.

33, 166. Beast. Swinburne comments on the part and the passage: "Cenci, as we see him, is the full-blown flower, the accomplished result of a life absolute in its luck, in power and success and energetic enjoyment. . . . What he is good fortune has made him. . . . The august and horrible figure is painted as naturally as nobly; his rage and his religion, the loathing that underlies his lust, and the lust that inflames his loathing; his hungry abhorrence of his daughter's beauty of body and soul — ('Beast that thou art!'), his faith in God and fury against good. . . . This is evidence enough that if Shelley had lived the *Cenci* would not now be the one great play written in the great manner of Shakespeare's men that our literature has seen since the time of these." *Fortnightly Review*, May, 1869.

45, 70. fire. The sense requires a period at end.

48, 141-43. I . . . shadow. The lines occur in an earlier form as a fragment published by Mrs. Shelley and dated 1817. (See Locock, *Examination*.)

"To nurse the image of unfelt caresses

Till dim imagination just possesses

The half-created shadow."

50. Act III, Scene i. For criticism of this, see Lewes's essay (*Westminster Review*, April, 1841) and the *Note-book of the Shelley Society*, p. 180.

51, 37. Misery has killed. Lewes comments: "We do not agree with Leigh Hunt's explanation [in *The Indicator*] here, that she personifies herself as Misery and has killed her father in thought; we think she means that the intensity of her misery has

absorbed all consciousness of its cause (father), and therefore she is mad." The passage is somewhat blind, but it appears to be a continuation of her preceding speech and a repetition of its idea, i. e., *father* is the *hidden thought* which is gone, and *misery* the *burden* which remains, while the suggestion of parricide is the latent thought in her mind coming to birth.

61, 247. and . . . rock. Cf. Preface, note, p. 10.

63-65, 298-334. Well . . . law. The speech is a good illustration of the weakness of the scene-making; the long narrative clogs the action, and if the facts were to be introduced at all they might better have been given a scene to themselves.

68, 17. But. In the sense of *except*. The comma after *oil* is omitted by all editors.

72, 91. meet. A comma is required following.

78-79, 128-136. Earth . . . beams. For the criticism of this climax, see Lewes's essay and the *Note-book of the Shelley Society*, pp. 56; 89-92.

93, 112. innocent of parricide. For the discussion of Beatrice's denial, see Hunt, *The Indicator*, Lewes's essay, the *Note-book of the Shelley Society*, pp. 66, 184-185.

104, 50. loadstar of your life. The lines are touched with reminiscence of the recent death of Shelley's son, William, as is also the character of the boy Bernardo.

107, 112. Beatrice. The sense requires a period at end.

111. Act V, Scene iii. For criticism of this, see Lewes's essay.

125, 158. Give yourself. The suggestion for this speech is in the original history; but the final repose of tragic art was never better exemplified than in this simple and powerful close.

Appendix

SOURCES OF THE CENCI

I. THE RELATION

The Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci exists in several manuscript copies. One of these, formerly in the Frederickson collection, contains a note by Michael Jones, Rome, 1818: "Signor Farinacci, the Advocate of the Cenci, composed a Report of the Case and Trial from which this abstract was compiled at the time and secretly distributed in manuscript at Rome where it is not allowed to be printed." Crawford, in his examination of the historical character of "the relation," states that no full report of the trial exists in the Vatican, but only "various letters and appeals, the final defense and summing up" are found there (Vatican MSS. Codex No. 6533). He also mentions an Italian account of the trial and execution, which he describes as "based on the 'relazioni' " and published in London, 1821; and he adds that a copy of "the relation" itself was first printed at Paris, 1822, by F. D'Urbain in the *Bibliothèque de la société des Bibliographes*, and was translated into French by Alphonse de Malartie. A French version was also given by Marie Henri Beyle (Stendhal), *Chroniques et Nouvelles*, 1855, which differs in details from the translation made by Shelley and sent by him to Peacock. A manuscript copy belonging to the editor, with the name Edward Gardner, Rome, 1834, and written in a seventeenth-century hand, agrees with Shelley's version very closely until toward the end, where it becomes much more minute and vivid

in description and varies materially in the dying speeches of the victims. Shelley, in his play, adhered to the historical narrative and seems to have endeavored to include as much as possible of the original events and traits. Shelley's translation was published by Forman, as follows :

RELATION OF THE DEATH OF THE FAMILY OF
THE CENCI.

The most wicked life which the Roman nobleman, Francesco Cenci, led while he lived in this world, not only occasioned his own ruin and death, but also that of many others, and brought down the entire destruction of his house. This nobleman was the son of Monsignore Cenci, who, having been treasurer during the pontificate of Pius V., left immense wealth to Francesco, his only son. From this inheritance alone he enjoyed an income of 160,000 crowns, and he increased his fortune by marrying an exceedingly rich lady, who died after she had given birth to seven unfortunate children. He then contracted a second marriage with Lucretia Petroni, a lady of a noble Roman family ; but he had no children by her. Sodomy was the least, and atheism the greatest, of the vices of Francesco ; as is proved by the tenor of his life ; for he was three times accused of sodomy, and paid the sum of 100,000 crowns to government, in commutation of the punishment rightfully awarded to this crime : and concerning his religion, it is sufficient to state, that he never frequented any church ; and although he caused a small chapel, dedicated to the apostle St. Thomas, to be built in the court of his palace, his intention in so doing was to bury there all his children, whom he cruelly hated. He had driven the eldest of these, Giacomo, Cristofero, and Rocco, from the paternal mansion, while they were yet too young to have given him any real cause of displeasure. He sent them to

the University of Salamanca, but, refusing to remit to them there the money necessary for their maintenance, they desperately returned home. They found that this change only increased their misery, for the hatred and contempt of their father towards them was so aggravated, that he refused to dress or maintain them, so that they were obliged to have recourse to the Pope, who caused Cenci to make them a fit allowance, with which they withdrew from his house.

The third imprisonment of Francesco for his accustomed crime of sodomy occurred at this time, and his sons took occasion to supplicate the Pope to punish their father, and to remove so great a monster from his family. The Pope, though before inclined to condemn Francesco to the deserved punishment of death, would not do it at the request of his sons, but permitted him again to compound with the law, by paying the accustomed penalty of 100,000 crowns. The hatred of Francesco towards his sons was augmented by this proceeding on their parts; he cursed them; and often also struck and ill-treated his daughters. The eldest of these, being unable any longer to support the cruelty of her father, exposed her miserable condition to the Pope, and supplicated him either to marry her, according to his choice, or to shut her up in a monastery, that by any means she might be liberated from the cruel oppression of her parent. Her prayer was heard, and the Pope, in pity to her unhappiness, bestowed her in marriage to Signore Carlo Gabrielli, one of the first gentlemen of the city of Gabbio, and obliged Francesco to give her a fitting dowry of some thousand crowns.

Francesco, fearing that his youngest daughter would, when she grew up, follow the example of her sister, bethought himself how to hinder this design, and for that purpose shut her up alone in an apartment of the palace,

where he himself brought her food, so that no one might approach her ; and imprisoned her in this manner for several months, often inflicting on her blows with a stick.

In the meantime ensued the death of two of his sons, Rocco and Cristoforo — one being assassinated by a surgeon, and the other by Paolo Corso, while he was attending mass. The inhuman father showed every sign of joy on hearing this news, saying that nothing would exceed his pleasure if all his children died, and that when the grave should receive the last he would, as a demonstration of joy, make a bonfire of all that he possessed. And on the present occasion, as a further sign of his hatred, he refused to pay the smallest sum towards the funeral expenses of his murdered sons. Francesco carried his wicked debauchery to such an excess, that he caused girls (of whom he constantly kept a number in his house), and also common courtesans, to sleep in the bed of his wife, and often endeavored, by force and threats, to debauch his daughter Beatrice, who was now grown up, and exceedingly beautiful. He gave her more liberty in his palace, and was not ashamed to seek her naked in her bed, showing himself thus with his courtesans, and making her witness of all that could pass between them and him. He tried to persuade the poor girl, by an enormous heresy, that children born of the commerce of a father with his daughter were all saints, and that the saints who obtained the highest places in Paradise had been thus born. Beatrice's resistance of his infamous desires was punished by blows and ill treatment.

Beatrice, finding it impossible to continue to live in so miserable a manner, followed the example of her sister ; she sent a well-written supplication to the Pope, imploring him to exercise his authority in withdrawing her from the violence and cruelty of her father. But this petition, which might, if listened to, have saved this unfortunate girl

from an early death, produced not the least effect. It was afterwards found among the collection of memorials, and it is pretended that it never came before the Pope.

Francesco, having discovered this attempt on the part of his daughter, became more enraged, and redoubled his tyranny; confining with rigor not only Beatrice, but also his wife. At length, these unhappy women, finding themselves, without hope of relief, driven by desperation, resolved to plan his death.

The Palace Cenci was sometimes visited by a Monsignore Guerra—a young man of handsome person and attractive manners, and of that facile character which might easily be induced to become a partner in any action, good or evil, as it might happen. His countenance was pleasing, and his person tall and well proportioned; he was somewhat in love with Beatrice, and well acquainted with the turpitude of Francesco's character, and was hated by him on account of the familiar intercourse which subsisted between him and the children of this unnatural father: for this reason he timed his visits with caution, and never came to the house but when he knew that Francesco was absent. He was moved to a lively compassion of the state of Lucretia and Beatrice, who often related their increasing misery to him, and his pity was forever fed and augmented by some new tale of tyranny and cruelty. In one of these conversations Beatrice let fall some words which plainly indicated that she and her mother-in-law contemplated the murder of their tyrant, and Monsignore Guerra not only showed approbation of their design, but also promised to co-operate with them in their undertaking. Thus stimulated, Beatrice communicated the design to her eldest brother, Giacomo, without whose concurrence it was impossible that they should succeed. This latter was easily drawn into consent, since he was utterly disgusted with his father,

who ill-treated him, and refused to allow him a sufficient support for his wife and children.

The apartments of Monsignore Guerra were the place in which the circumstances of the crime about to be committed were concerted and determined on. Here Giacomo, with the understanding of his sister and mother-in-law, held various consultations, and finally resolved to commit the murder of Francesco to two of his vassals, who had become his inveterate enemies: one called Marzio, and the other Olympio: the latter, by means of Francesco, had been deprived of his post as castellan of the Rock of Petrella.

It was already well known that Francesco, with the permission of Signor Marzio di Colonna, baron of that feud, had resolved to retire to Petrella, and to pass the summer there with his family. Some banditti of the Kingdom of Naples were hired, and were instructed to lie in wait in the woods about Petrella, and, upon advice being given them of the approach of Francesco, to seize upon him. This scheme was so arranged that, although the robbers were only to seize and take off Francesco, yet that his wife and children should not be suspected of being accomplices in the act. But the affair did not succeed; for as the banditti were not informed of his approach in time enough, Francesco arrived safe and sound at Petrella. They were obliged therefore to form some new scheme to obtain the end which every day made them more impatient to effect; for, Francesco still persisted in his wicked conduct. He, being an old man, above seventy years of age, never quitted the castle; therefore no use could be made of the banditti, who were still secreted in the environs. It was determined, therefore, to accomplish the murder in Francesco's own house.

Marzio and Olympio were called to the castle; and Bea-

trice, accompanied by her mother-in-law, conversed with them from a window during the night-time, when her father slept. She ordered them to repair to Monsignore Guerra with a note, in which they were desired to murder Francesco, in consideration of a reward of a thousand crowns : a third to be given them before the act, by Monsignore Guerra, and the other two thirds, by the ladies themselves, after the deed should be accomplished. Having consented to this agreement, they were secretly admitted into the castle the 8th of September, 1598 ; but because this day was the anniversary of the birth of the Blessed Virgin, the Signora Lucretia, held back by her veneration for so holy a time, desired, with the consent of her daughter-in-law, that the execution of the murder should be put off until the following day. They dexterously mixed opium with the drink of Francesco, who, upon going to bed, was soon oppressed by a deep sleep. About midnight his daughter herself led the two assassins into the apartment of her father, and left them there that they might execute the deed they had undertaken, and retired to a chamber close by, where Lucretia remained also, expecting the return of the murderers, and the relation of their success. Soon after the assassins entered, and told the ladies that pity had held them back, and that they could not overcome their repugnance to kill in cold blood a poor, sleeping old man. These words filled Beatrice with anger, and after having bitterly reviled them as cowards and traitors, she exclaimed, "Since you have not courage enough to murder a sleeping man, I will kill my father myself ; but your lives shall not be long secure." The assassins, hearing this short but terrible threat, feared that if they did not commit the deed, the tempest would burst over their own heads, took courage, and re-entered the chamber, where Francesco slept, and with a hammer drove

a nail into his head, making it pass by his eye, and another they drove into his neck. After a few struggles the unhappy Francesco breathed his last. The murderers departed, after having received the remainder of the promised reward ; besides which, Beatrice gave Marzio a mantle trimmed with gold. After this the two ladies, after drawing out the two nails, enveloped the body in a fine sheet, and carried it to an open gallery that overhung a garden, and had underneath an elder-tree ; from thence they threw it down, so that it might be believed that Francesco, attending a call of nature, was traversing this gallery, when, being only supported by feeble beams, it had given way, and thus had lost his life.

And so indeed was it believed the next day, when the feigned lamentations of Lucretia and Beatrice, who appeared inconsolable, spread the news of Francesco's death. He received an honorable burial ; and his family, after a short stay at the castle, returned to Rome to enjoy the fruits of their crime. They passed some time there in tranquillity ; but Divine Justice, which would not allow so atrocious a wickedness to remain hid and unpunished, so ordered it, that the Court of Naples, to which the account of the death of Cenci was forwarded, began to entertain doubts concerning the mode by which he came by it, and sent a commissary to examine the body and to take informations. Among other things, this man discovered a circumstance to the prejudice of the family of the deceased : it appeared that the day after the event of her father's death, Beatrice had given to wash a sheet covered with blood, saying : . . . [For the passage here omitted Forman refers the curious to the original Italian (not the French version), in the *Mélanges publiés pour la Société des Bibliophiles Français*. Paris, 1822.] These informations were instantly forwarded to the Court of Rome ; but, neverthe-

less, several months passed without any step being taken in disfavor of the Cenci family; and, in the meantime, the youngest son of Francesco died, and two only remained of the five that he had had; namely, Giacomo and Bernardo. Monsignore Guerra, having heard of the notification made by the Court of Naples to that of Rome, fearing that Marzio and Olympio might fall into the hands of justice, and be induced to confess their crime, suddenly hired men to murder them, but succeeded only in assassinating Olympio at the city of Terni. Marzio, who had escaped this misfortune, soon incurred that of being imprisoned at Naples, where he confessed the whole; and instantly, while the arrival of Marzio at Rome from Naples was expected, Giacomo and Bernardo were arrested, and imprisoned in the Corte Savella, and Lucretia and Beatrice were confined in their own house under a good guard; but afterwards they were also conducted to the prison where were the brothers. They were here examined, and all constantly denied the crime, and particularly Beatrice, who also denied having given to Marzio the mantle trimmed with gold, of which mention was before made; and Marzio, overcome and moved by the presence of mind and courage of Beatrice, retracted all that he had deposed at Naples, and, rather than again confess, obstinately died under his torments.

There not being sufficient proof to justify putting the Cenci family to the torture, they were all transferred to Castello, where they remained several months in tranquillity. But, for their misfortune, one of the murderers of Olympio at Terni fell into the hands of justice; he confessed that he had been hired to this deed by Monsignore Guerra, who had also commissioned him to assassinate Marzio. Fortunately for this prelate, he received prompt information of the testimony given against him, and was

able to hide himself for a time, and to plan his escape, which was very difficult; for his stature, the fairness and beauty of his countenance, and his light hair, made him conspicuous for discovery. He changed his dress for that of a charcoal-man, blackening his face, and shaving his head; and thus disguised, driving two asses before him, with some bread and onions in his hands, he passed freely through Rome, under the eyes of the ministers of justice, who sought him everywhere; and, without being recognized by any one, passed out of one of the gates of the city, where, after a short time, he was met by the sbirri, who were searching the country, and passed unknown by them, not without suffering great fear at his risk of being discovered and arrested: by means of this ingenious disguise he effected his escape to a safe country.

The flight of Monsignore Guerra, joined to the confession of the murderer of Olympio, aggravated the other proofs so much, that the Cenci were retransferred from Castello to Corte Savella, and were condemned to be put to the torture. The two sons sank vilely under their torments, and became convicted; Lucretia, being of advanced age, having completed her fiftieth year, and being of a fat make, was not able to resist the torture of the cord, and therefore told all she knew. But the Signora Beatrice, being young, lively, and strong, neither with good nor ill treatment, with menaces, nor fear of torture, would allow a single word to pass her lips which might inculpate her; and even, by her lively eloquence, confused the judges who examined her. The Pope, being informed of all that passed by Signor Ulysse Moraci, the judge employed in this affair, became suspicious that the beauty of Beatrice had softened the mind of this judge, and committed the cause to another, who found out another mode of torment, called the torture of the hair; and when she was already tied under

this torture, he brought before her her mother-in-law and brothers. They began altogether to exhort her to confess ; saying, that since the crime had been committed, they must suffer the punishment. Beatrice, after some resistance, said, "So you all wish to die, and to disgrace and ruin our house ? — This is not right ; but since it so pleases you, so let it be : " — and turning to the jailors, she told them to unbind her, and that all the examinations might be brought to her, saying, "That which I ought to confess, that will I confess ; that to which I ought to assent, to that will I assent ; and that which I ought to deny, that will I deny : " — and in this manner she was convicted without having confessed. They were then all unbound ; and, since it was now five months since all had met, they wished to eat together that day : but three days afterwards, they were again divided — the ladies being left in the Corte Savella, and the brothers being transferred to the dungeons of the Tordinona.

The Pope, after having seen all the examinations, and the entire confessions, ordered that the delinquents should be drawn through the streets at the tails of horses, and afterwards decapitated. Many cardinals and princes interested themselves, and entreated that at least they might be allowed to draw up their defence. The Pope at first refused to comply, replying with severity, and asking these intercessors what defence had been allowed to Francesco, when he had been so barbarously murdered in his sleep ; but afterwards he yielded to allow them twenty-five days' time. The most celebrated Roman advocates undertook to defend the criminals ; and, at the end of the appointed time, brought their writings to the Pope. The first that spoke was the advocate Nicolas di Angelis ; but the Pope interrupted him angrily in the middle of his discourse, saying that he greatly wondered that there

existed in Rome children unnatural enough to kill their father; and that there should be found advocates depraved enough to defend so horrible a crime. These words silenced all except the advocate Farinacci; who said, "Holy Father, we have not fallen at your feet to defend the atrocity of the crime, but to save the life of the innocent, when your holiness will deign to hear us." The Pope listened patiently to him for four hours, and then, taking the writings, dismissed them. The advocate Altieri, who was the last to depart, turned back, and, throwing himself at the feet of the Pope, said that his office as advocate to the poor would not allow him to refuse to appear in this affair; and the Pope replied that he was not surprised at the part that he, but at that which the others had taken. Instead of retiring to rest, he spent the whole night in studying the cause with the Cardinal di San Marcello — noting with great care the most exculpating passages of the writing of the advocate Farinacci; with which he became so satisfied, that he gave hope of granting a pardon to the criminals; for the crimes of the father and children were contrasted and balanced in this writing; and to save the sons, the greater guilt was attributed to Beatrice; and thus, by saving the mother-in-law, the daughter might the more easily escape, who was dragged, as it were, to the committing so enormous a crime by the cruelty of her father. The Pope, therefore, that the criminals might enjoy the benefit of time, ordered them again to be confined in secret. But since, by the high dispensation of Providence, it was resolved that they should incur the just penalty of parricide, it so happened, that at this time Paolo Santa Croce killed his mother in the town of Subiaco, because she refused to give up her inheritance to him. And the Pope, upon the occurrence of this second crime of this nature, resolved to punish those guilty of

the first; and the more so, because the matricide Santa Croce had escaped from the vengeance of the law by flight. The Pope returned to Monte Cavallo the 6th of May, that he might consecrate the next morning, in the neighboring church of S. Maria degli Angeli, the Cardinal Diverstiana, appointed by him to be Bishop of Olumbré, on the 3d of May of the same year, 1599: on the 10th of May he called into his presence Monsignore Ferrante Taverna, governor of Rome, and said to him, "I give up into your hands the Cenci cause, that you may as soon as you can execute the justice allotted to them." As soon as the governor arrived at his palace, he communicated the sentence to, and held a council with, the criminal judge, concerning the manner of death to be inflicted on the criminals. Many nobles instantly hastened to the palaces of the Quirinal and the Vatican, to implore the grace of at least a private death for the ladies, and the pardon of the innocent Bernardo; and, fortunately, they were in time to save the life of this youth, because many hours were necessarily employed in preparing the scaffold over the bridge of S. Angelo, and then in waiting for the Confraternity of Mercy, who were to accompany the condemned to the place of suffering.

The sentence was executed the morning of Saturday, the 11th of May. The messengers charged with the communication of the sentence, and the Brothers of the Conforteria, were sent to the several prisons at five the preceding night; and at six the sentence of death was communicated to the unhappy brothers while they were placidly sleeping. Beatrice on hearing it broke into a piercing lamentation, and into passionate gesture, exclaiming, "How is it possible, O my God! that I must so suddenly die?" Lucretia, as prepared and already resigned to her fate, listened without terror to the reading

of this terrible sentence; and with gentle exhortations induced her daughter-in-law to enter the chapel with her; and the latter, whatever excess she might have indulged in on the first intimation of a speedy death, so much the more now courageously supported herself, and gave every one certain proofs of a humble resignation. Having requested that a notary might be allowed to come to her, and her request being granted, she made her will, in which she left 15,000 crowns to the Fraternity of the Sacre Stimmate; and willed that all her dowry should be employed in portioning for marriage fifty maidens; and Lucretia, imitating the example of her daughter-in-law, ordered that she should be buried in the church of S. Gregorio at Monte Celio, willed 32,000 crowns for charitable uses, and made other legacies; after which they passed some time in the Conforteria, reciting psalms and litanies and other prayers, with so much fervor that it well appeared that they were assisted by the peculiar grace of God. At eight o'clock they confessed, heard mass, and received the holy communion. Beatrice, considering that it was not decorous to appear before the judges and on the scaffold with their splendid dresses, ordered two dresses, one for herself, and the other for her mother-in-law, made in the manner of the nuns — gathered up, and with long sleeves of black cotton for Lucretia, and of common silk for herself; with a large cord girdle. When these dresses came, Beatrice rose, and, turning to Lucretia — “Mother,” said she, “the hour of our departure is drawing near, let us dress therefore in these clothes, and let us mutually aid one another in this last office.” Lucretia readily complied with this invitation, and they dressed, each helping the other, showing the same indifference and pleasure as if they were dressing for a feast.

The Company of Mercy arrived soon after at the prisons of the Tordinona ; and while they were waiting below in the street with the crucifix until the condemned should descend, an accident happened, which gave rise to such a tumult among the immense crowd there collected that there was danger of much disorder. It thus happened : some foreign gentlemen, who were posted at a high window, inadvertently threw down a flower-pot which was outside the window, which, falling on one of the brothers of the Order of Mercy, mortally wounded him. This caused a disturbance in the crowd ; and those who were too far off to know the cause, took flight, and falling one over the other, several were wounded. When the tumult was calmed, the brothers Giacomo and Bernardo descended to the door of the prison, near which opportunely happened to be some fiscal officers, who, going up to Bernardo, told him that through the clemency of the sovereign pontiff, his life was spared to him, with this condition, that he should be present at the death of his relations. A scarlet mantle trimmed with gold, in which he had at first been conducted to prison, was given him, to envelop him. Giacomo was already on the car, when the *placet* of the Pope arrived, freeing him from the severer portion of the punishment added to the sentence, and ordering that it should be executed only by the hammer and quartering.

The funeral procession passed through the Via dell' Orso, by the Apollinara, thence through the Piazza Navona ; from the church of S. Pantalio to the Piazza Pollarola, through the Campo di Fiori, S. Carlo a Castinari, to the Arco de' Conte Cenci ; proceeding, it stopped under the Palace Cenci, and then finally rested at the Corte Savella, to take the two ladies. When these arrived, Lucretia remained last, dressed in black, as has

been described, with a veil of the same color, which covered her as far as her girdle ; Beatrice was beside her, also covered by a veil ; they wore velvet slippers, with silk roses and gold fastenings ; and, instead of manacles, their wrists were bound by a silk cord, which was fastened to their girdles in such a manner as to give them almost the free use of their hands. Each had in her left hand the holy sign of benediction, and in the right a handkerchief, with which Lucretia wiped her tears, and Beatrice the perspiration from her forehead. Being arrived at the place of punishment, Bernardo was left on the scaffold, and the others were conducted to the chapel. During this dreadful separation, this unfortunate youth, reflecting that he was soon going to behold the decapitation of his nearest relatives, fell down in a deadly swoon, from which, however, he was at last recovered, and seated opposite the block. The first that came forth to die was Lucretia, who, being fat, found difficulty in placing herself to receive the blow. The executioner taking off her handkerchief, her neck was discovered, which was still handsome, although she was fifty years of age. Blushing deeply, she cast her eyes down, and then, casting them up to heaven, full of tears, she exclaimed, “ Behold, dearest Jesus, this guilty soul about to appear before thee—to give an account of its acts, mingled with many crimes. When it shall appear before thy Godhead, I pray thee to look on it with an eye of mercy, and not of justice.” She then began to recite the psalm *Miserere mei Deus*, and placing her neck under the axe, the head was struck from her body while she was repeating the second verse of this psalm, at the words *et secundum multitudinem*. When the executioner raised the head, the populace saw with wonder that the countenance long retained its vivacity, until it was wrapped up in a

black handkerchief, and placed in a corner of the scaffold. While the scaffold was being arranged for Beatrice, and whilst the Brotherhood returned to the chapel for her, the balcony of a shop filled with spectators fell, and five of those underneath were wounded, so that two died a few days after. Beatrice, hearing the noise, asked the executioner if her mother had died well, and it being replied that she had, she knelt before the crucifix, and spoke thus: "Be thou everlastingly thanked, O my gracious Saviour, since, by the good death of my mother, thou hast given me assurance of thy mercy towards me." Then, rising, she courageously and devoutly walked towards the scaffold, repeating by the way several prayers with so much fervor of spirit, that all who heard her shed tears of compassion. Ascending the scaffold, while she arranged herself, she also turned her eyes to heaven, and thus prayed: "Most beloved Jesus, who, relinquishing thy divinity, becamest a man; and didst through love purge my sinful soul also of its original sin with thy precious blood; deign, I beseech thee, to accept that which I am about to shed at thy most merciful tribunal, as a penalty which may cancel my many crimes, and spare me a part of that punishment justly due to me." Then she placed her head under the axe, which at one blow was divided from her body, as she was repeating the second verse of the psalm *De profundis*, at the words *fiant aures tuæ*; the blow gave a violent motion to her body, and discomposed her dress. The executioner raised the head to the view of the people, and in placing it in the coffin placed underneath, the cord by which it was suspended slipped from his hold, and the head fell to the ground, shedding a great deal of blood, which was wiped up with water and sponges.

On the death of his sister, Bernardo again fainted; the

most efficacious remedies were for some time uselessly employed upon him ; and it was believed by all that his second swoon, having found him already overcome and without strength, had deprived him of life. At length, after the lapse of a quarter of an hour, he came to himself, and by slow degrees recovered the use of his senses. Giacomo was then conducted to the scaffold, and the executioner took from him the mourning cloak which enveloped him. He fixed his eyes on Bernardo, and then, turning, addressed the people with a loud voice: "Now that I am about to present myself before the Tribunal of infallible Truth, I swear that if my Saviour, pardoning me my faults, shall place me in the road to salvation, I will incessantly pray for the preservation of his Holiness, who has spared me the aggravation of punishment but too much due to my enormous crime, and has granted life to my brother Bernardo, who is most innocent of the guilt of parricide, as I have constantly declared in all my examinations. It only afflicts me in these my last moments that he should have been obliged to be present at so fatal a scene: but since, O my God, it has so pleased thee, *fiat voluntas tua*." After speaking thus, he knelt down ; the executioner blinded his eyes, and tied his legs to the scaffold, gave him a blow on the temple with a leaded hammer, cut off his head, and cut his body into four pieces which were fixed on the hooks of the scaffolding.

When the last penalty of justice was over, Bernardo was reconducted to the prison of the Tordinona, where he was soon attacked by a burning fever ; he was bled and received other remedies, so that in the end he recovered his health, though not without great suffering. The bodies of Lucretia and Beatrice were left at the end of the bridge until the evening, illuminated by two torches,

and surrounded by so great a concourse of people that it was impossible to cross the bridge. An hour after dark, the body of Beatrice was placed in a coffin, covered by a black velvet pall, richly adorned with gold ; garlands of flowers were placed, one at her head, and another at her feet ; and the body was strewed with flowers. It was accompanied to the church of St. Peter in Montorio by the Brotherhood of the Order of Mercy, and followed by many Franciscan monks, with great pomp and innumerable torches ; she was there buried before the high altar, after the customary ceremony had been performed. By reason of the distance of the church from the bridge, it was four hours after dark before the ceremony was finished. Afterwards the body of Lucretia, accompanied in the same manner, was carried to the church of S. Gregorio upon the Celian Hill, where, after the ceremony, it was honorably buried.

Beatrice was rather tall, of a fair complexion ; and she had a dimple on each cheek, which, especially when she smiled, added a grace to her lovely countenance that transported every one who beheld her. Her hair appeared like threads of gold ; and, because they were extremely long, she used to tie it up, and, when afterwards she loosened it, the splendid ringlets dazzled the eyes of the spectator. Her eyes were of a deep blue, pleasing, and full of fire. To all these beauties she added, both in words and actions, a spirit and a majestic vivacity that captivated every one. She was twenty years of age when she died.

Lucretia was as tall as Beatrice, but her full make made her appear less ; she was also fair, and so fresh complexioned, that at fifty, which was her age when she died, she did not appear above thirty. Her hair was black, and her teeth regular and white to an extraordinary degree.

Giacomo was of a middle size, fair but ruddy, and with black eyebrows ; affable in his nature, of good address, and well skilled in every science, and in all knightly exercises. He was not more than twenty-eight years of age when he died.

Lastly, Bernardo so closely resembled Beatrice in complexion, features, and everything else, that if they had changed clothes the one might easily have been taken for the other. His mind also seemed formed in the same model as that of his sister ; and at the time of her death he was six-and-twenty years old.

He remained in the prison of Tordinona until the month of September of the same year, after which time, at the intercession of the most Venerable Grand Brotherhood of the Most Holy Crucifix of St. Marcellus, he obtained the favor of his liberty upon paying the sum of 25,000 crowns to the Hospital of the Most Holy Trinity of Pilgrims. Thus he, as the sole remnant of the Cenci family, became heir to all their possessions. He is now married, and has a son named Cristoforo.

The most faithful portrait of Beatrice exists in the Palace of the Villa Pamfili, without the gate of San Pancrazio: if any other is to be found in the Palazzo Cenci, it is not shown to any one — so as not to renew the memory of so horrible an event.

This was the end of this family : and until the time when this account is put together it has not been possible to find the Marquis Paolo Santa Croce ; but there is a rumor that he dwells in Brescia, a city of the Venetian states.

The above narrative embodies the popular tradition of the Cenci tragedy. Muratori, in the *Annali d'Italia*, on such information as he had from this source and from his

own investigation into the archives, introduced the tale into formal history. Shelley's drama concentrated attention upon it, and the legend of the Cenci, as it may fairly be called, has been retold in drama, poem, biography, and history during the last century, with varying accretions. The tale became the subject of historical controversy, and several attempts have been made to arrive at the truth, of which the latest, and the fullest in English, is the paper of F. Marion Crawford, *Beatrice Cenci: The True Story of a Misunderstood Tragedy, with New Documents*, in the *Century Magazine*, January, 1908. This account is based on Bertolotti's historical study of the trial. Crawford finds the family history of the Cenci to be a tissue of crime and fraud; nevertheless, in regard to the particular crime concerned in the drama, he minimizes the evil character of the father, and finds that Beatrice was justly condemned.

The principal points brought out are these. Beatrice testified that her father frequently beat her with a *nerbo*, an instrument used for punishing criminals; but she kept silence as to the reason for this cruelty, and refused to swear to the fact of her father's incestuous passion. The appeal said to have been made to the Pope previous to the murder has never been found, nor was it then produced. She was not sixteen when she died, but twenty-two years and seven months old. A letter from the representative of the Duke of Modena to his master states that after her condemnation Beatrice bitterly complained not only because she must suffer death but because she had sacrificed her honor to bribe the warden, Olympio, a fact that "no one had ever known." Giacomo confessed that he had known of these relations, but only after the murder. Beatrice in her will left five hundred scudi to an infant child whom she gave to the care of two intimate friends. Beatrice confessed, after Olympio's death, that he had

first suggested the murder. The evidence of Giacomo and Beatrice is, presumably, that given under torture. It is on the weight to be given this evidence and the interpretation to be put upon it that the case rests. Mr. Crawford's conclusion is that Beatrice, having yielded to the suit of Olympio, found herself with child, and murdered her father from fear of discovery; and that her father's dismissal of the warden and cruel treatment of herself were due to an incomplete knowledge of the amour. Beatrice's statement that her honor was a bribe given the warden is necessarily excluded by such a theory. Mr. Crawford easily finds adequate motives for the consent of the rest of the family to the murder in the character and situation of each and builds up the plot of a modern novel as the true rationale of the story instead of the plot of a drama in the grand style, that Shelley evolved.

The problem is one for historical students and requires a more full and precise statement of the evidence and inquiry into its worth intrinsically than can be made here. It is sufficient to state the two views and indicate their grounds, and to refer to Mr. Crawford's paper as containing the complete history of every person in the Cenci group and as being an important contribution to the historical phase of the subject in English.

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